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H O M E.

A N O V E L.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

EXPECT NOT A STORY DECK'D IN THE GARB OF
FANCY,—BUT LOOK AT HOME.

VOLUME IV.

PRINTED FOR

J. MAWMAN, POULTRY, LONDON; AND BY AND
FOR T. WILSON, AND R. SPENCE, HIGH-OUSEGATE, YORK.

1802.

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Emma Hastings

H O M E.

CONTINUATION OF SIR ESMOND'S NARRATIVE.

SIR ESMOND passed two days in anxious deliberation, without being able to come to any determination that entirely pleased him.

From the first hour he had seen Matilda, he had been fascinated by her beauty and angelic sweetness; her deplorable situation by exciting the truest commiseration, and terror for her safety, had afterwards interested him deeply in her fate, yet the attachment he had for her before she left Mrs. Sorell's, was slight to what he now felt. The tenderness he had seen her show to her mother; her timidity with himself; her melting softness and extreme helplessness, had entwined her about his

heart in such a manner, as made him feel that he could sooner part with his existence than with her. He had no hesitation therefore in resolving to marry her, but to his doing it immediately, many obstacles presented themselves.

Ought he to become the son of Mrs. Fanbrook without more knowledge of her character? Could he introduce her to his friends, and wish her to be received and caressed as the mother of his wife, while uncertain that she might not prove a disgraceful companion? Her veracity indeed, was apparently infinitely more to be trusted than Mrs. Sorell's, but still the assertions of the latter had never been refuted by the conduct of Mrs. Fanbrook; and ought he then wholly to despise the warnings so repeatedly given him by Mrs. Sorell, to be upon his guard, otherwise Mrs. Fanbrook would infallibly impose upon him? Her removal from Mrs. Sorell's might be merely a measure of prudence, from knowing that she could not there carry on her designs without being detected. Her request that he would protect Matilda as a brother, if he did

not think her worthy to be his wife, had a favourable appearance; but it might only be an artifice to gain his approbation, while she saw there was no danger of his complying with her request.—Matilda thought well of her mother, but was her opinion to be trusted? How many, much older than Matilda, were wholly blind to the characters of their relations?

But notwithstanding this reasoning, any suspicions to the prejudice of Mrs Fanbrook seemed so unworthy of her, that he would have banished them entirely from his mind, had not the recent fate of a friend, who had been betrayed into an unfortunate marriage, and cruelly deceived in characters he had no cause to distrust, dwelt in his thoughts, and led him to entertain doubts of Mrs. Fanbrook almost in opposition to his senses.

Were he to delay his marriage, and leave Matilda at liberty till his doubts were removed, what might not be the consequence? If placed in an easy independent situation, she would soon have numerous admirers who might rob

him of her affections; or, her mother, if she was really unworthy, might soon entangle her in a marriage which offered more brilliant advantages than he possessed. Might she not even be again exposed to the arts of a Phipps or a Peel? The very possibility of such dangers to her, he shuddered to think of, and could not be a moment easy, if she were for an instant removed from his immediate care and protection.

Marrying privately, and keeping his marriage for some time concealed, seemed a more eligible measure, but to this also there were objections. He had frequently declared to his uncle, that were he even so unfortunate as to fix his affections contrary to his wishes, he would at least never marry without his knowledge; and were he to inform him at present of the choice he had made, it might occasion him much fruitless anxiety, while the delays he would demand, till inquiries could be made into the history and character of Mrs. Fanbrook, might be troublesome and tedious in the extreme. Were Mr. Anson even to consent easily to his marriage, would he also consent to Matilda's being secluded from so-

ciety? and how could he endure to have her time sacrificed to disagreeable visits and idle ceremonies, when he wished it to be devoted entirely to himself? And if she appeared immediately in public as his wife, he might never be certain of possessing her affection so completely as he wished.

He had long resolved to continue unmarried, if he could not meet with a woman he not only loved, but by whom he was sincerely beloved; and he had seen men so often deceived in this particular, which was indeed so difficult to ascertain, where interest could be supposed to have any influence, that he had often imagined he should never marry. He now found he should be less miserable in marrying Matilda, without that return of affection he had hitherto thought indispensable, than in being separated from her,—but he was equally sensible he could never be happy without being truly beloved.

If he continued with her some time in her present retired situation, secure from every rival, he had no doubt of gaining her affec-

tions completely ; and, in retirement he might hope to be loved for his own sake alone. From her total ignorance of the enjoyments of wealth, and the allurements of the world, the dazzling attractions of fortune, which fascinated the minds, and corrupted the hearts of so many women, could have no power over hers ; but, in society, some feeling of interest or vanity might insensibly blend itself with her partiality for him, and give the latter an appearance of strength, which might be owing chiefly to the former. It was likewise only by her continuing in solitude, that he could have the happiness of her society, before acquaintance with the world lessened the bewitching simplicity of her manners, which to him was one of her most powerful attractions.

Passion and prudence were strongly at variance in the breast of Sir Esmond ; but, after long revolving the subject in his mind, he came to the resolution of continuing with Matilda on the terms that had been agreed upon, with a firm determination to marry her at the end of five or six months.

He imagined that he should then be able to form a decisive opinion of Mrs. Fanbrook ; and that, in the mean while, from Matilda's partiality for him, his plan could not be injurious to her, and was the best he could devise, to obviate all the difficulties he had to contend with. He was not without scruples about the distress it might occasion for a time to her and her mother, but he persuaded himself it would be slight. He meant to assure them both, in the most solemn manner, that they never should have any just cause to reproach him ; from which they would be sensible, that if there was nothing blamable in the conduct of Mrs. Fanbrook, they could have nothing ultimately to fear in his. They would trust, that he only delayed his marriage till he should be better acquainted with their characters, or until other events might render it more convenient ; and the mere suspension of the ceremony, under such circumstances, could not, he thought, be of consequence.

Of Mrs. Fanbrook's making any opposition to his design, he had no apprehension ; her state of health, extreme poverty, and the

dangers to which Matilda was exposed, all united to assure him of her acquiescence.

When he informed her of his intention, which he did in as gentle and consolatory terms as possible, he observed her turn pale; but this might be merely the effect of disappointed ambition. The opposition, however, which she seemed inclined to give to his design was greater than he apprehended; but as his determination was taken, he left her abruptly, that she might not have power to shake his resolution.

On leaving her apartment, he quitted the house for some time, that she might have leisure to reflect on his intention, as unalterable, before she could attempt to speak to him again; but the moment he returned to it, Matilda told him, that her mother had been very ill since his departure, and earnestly requested to see him.

He could not refuse, though he was even less disposed to yield to her solicitations than when they parted. He had just come

from a walk in the Park, which had forcibly recalled to his mind the circumstances that had occurred during her abode at Mrs. Sorell's; and the recollection was not favourable to Mrs. Fanbrook. He could not be unconscious that the prediction of Mrs. Sorell had been strictly verified; Mrs. Fanbrook had told him, "*a fine story of her sufferings,*" and it was certainly possible, that the whole might be, as Mrs. Sorell had said, a contrivance to inveigle him into marriage. Even Mrs. Sorell's repeated assertions that "*Matilda could act her part to a nicety,*" dwelt painfully on his mind, and almost threw a shade of suspicion over her conduct.—It made him, at least, think that it was his indispensable duty to himself, to be cautious in not involving himself rashly in marriage; and when therefore, he saw Mrs. Fanbrook, and heard her again urge him to relinquish her daughter, he listened with a predetermination to oppose her.

The more reluctance he showed to comply with her request, the more earnestly did she employ every argument that she could

think of to bend him to her purpose, till his distrust of her arose almost to conviction of her acting solely from selfish motives.

“Why, Mrs. Fanbrook,” cried he, impatiently, “will you persist in remonstrances which betray such want of confidence in me?—You say that you have reason to think well of my character; do not then distrust the solemn assurance I have given, that you shall never have any just cause for reproach.—Matilda is dearer to me than life, and I am persuaded that she loves me; but there are invincible obstacles to my marrying her immediately. I vowed to my Uncle, that I never would marry without his consent; and can I expect that he would instantly give it to my marriage with Matilda? or should I even expose him to the pain of viewing my wife in the light, in which, perhaps, he might regard her at present? In a very short time, every obstacle to our union may be removed, and he will then exult in my choice. But were we to separate in the interim, to what dangers would she be exposed! I

tremble every instant that she is out of my sight."

Mrs. Fanbrook eagerly replied, that if he would allow himself a moment's reflection, he would be convinced that he could only do right by either relinquishing or marrying Matilda.

"I will marry her!" he exclaimed, "but is it of any consequence, whether I do it now or a few months hence? You cannot, surely from your knowledge of what is passing in the world, consider the ceremony of marriage as any test of merit, and must be sensible how often it is degraded. Most unhappily, the form of marriage is frequently regarded as a sufficient testimony of the virtue of which it is only meant to be the support. It sometimes happens, that single women of the most licentious manners, are suddenly raised to a respectable place in society, by being dignified with the title of wife by a fond lover;—while other women, who have justly forfeited all claim to respect, by the violation

of every principle of duty, both as wives and mothers, are admitted into society merely by their marrying the very men on whose account they have been divorced!—Such marriages are an insult to virtue, and render it impossible to feel all the respect for the institution, which it is much to be wished could be felt for it.”

“It is true,” replied Mrs. Fanbrook, “but should we add to the calamity by showing contempt of marriage? Did I really disapprove of the institution, I should still be careful by what means I attempted to abolish it. Reformations should not be promoted by violent measures, and I should think myself justly excluded from society, if (though I thought it not wrong,) I lived with any man without being his wife. It would be arrogant presumption in a private individual, thus to oppose the voice of the most respectable part of society, and the great majority of mankind; but in me, it would also be acting in defiance of my principles; for I think the marriage institution indispensable to the vir-

tue and happiness of human beings; and whatever may be its defects, the showing disregard to it is not the means to redress grievances, but to increase vice."

"Matrimony," said Sir Esmond, "is certainly an institution which ought to be respected, as it is calculated to promote the welfare of mankind; but since it is so unfortunately regulated, you must not annex *too* high an idea to the name of wife, but consider, that while we act solely from virtuous motives, we ought to rest satisfied with our conduct."

Sir Esmond said nothing to Mrs. Fanbrook, that he did not think; but he had not reflected deeply on the subject on which he spoke. He had been shocked by seeing the daily abuses of the marriage institution, and he eagerly caught hold of them, to reconcile himself to his design. Hurried away by the impetuosity of his feelings, and his distrust of Mrs. Fanbrook, he persuaded himself that he was right, and continued to reiterate

every argument favourable to his views, till she was overpowered, if not convinced by his reasoning. He flattered himself however, that even if she were the character he wished, she would be consoled about Matilda, since he had now so fully explained his future intentions.

* * * *

FOR some days Mrs. Fanbrook continued so weak, that Sir Esmond gave up almost entirely the pleasure of seeing Matilda, that she might devote herself to the care of her mother, who stood in constant need of her attendance; though Sir Esmond did not now view her illness with the apprehensions he had done at first. He regarded her case as merely a state of debility, brought on by too low diet, and violent agitation of mind, and trusted that she would soon be restored to health.

The solicitude he showed about her, and the extreme tenderness and affection with which he behaved to Matilda, seemed to affect her deeply, and he was soon convinced that he was most truly beloved.

A short time had elapsed when he found himself obliged to go into the country for a few days. An estate was to be sold in the neighbourhood of Anson House, which it was of importance to him to have, and the proprietor having offered to dispose of it by private contract, Mr. Anson was anxious that Sir Esmond should transact the business himself, and he had therefore agreed to go into Kent the beginning of June.

When he informed Matilda of his intentions, he told her that his absence should be as short as possible, and could not at the farthest exceed a week.

She heard of his design with regret, but without expressing any wish to hasten his return sooner than might be convenient or agreeable to himself. Pleased as she always appeared to see him, she had never desired him to prolong or repeat his visits oftener than he chose; she wished him to be governed entirely by his own inclination, and thought the joy she discovered on their meeting, a

sufficient testimony of the satisfaction she found in his society.

Mrs. Fanbrook was now so much recovered that Sir Esmond told Matilda, he should expect on his return from Kent, that her time would be chiefly dedicated to himself, and hoped that she would then consider herself as his wife, though the ceremony of their marriage must still be delayed

Matilda already loved him with all the tenderness of a wife, and wished to regard her fate as indissolubly united to his.—Gratitude as well as affection, filled her heart whenever she thought of him; she viewed him as the deliverer of her mother and herself from the most horrible evils, and her life would not, she felt, be too great a sacrifice for his happiness. These sentiments she had frequently acknowledged to him, and now, concern for their approaching separation, love and gratitude, all united to make her listen to his proposal in a manner that he thought assured him of her consent.

The evening before his departure, she asked him several questions about his journey, and particularly inquired if he would be any where in Kent, except at Anson-House?

He told her that he should pass all the time he could spare from business, at his uncle, Sir John Ormville's, whose house was but a few miles from his own.

On saying this he recollected that he had neglected to get some new music he had intended to carry to Miss Ormville, and expressed much regret for the omission.

Matilda asked if Miss Ormville was a good musician?

“She plays with great taste on the piano-forte,” replied Sir Esmond.

“Is she young?”

“About twenty one.”

“And handsome?”

“ And handsome : but I forget her appearance, in admiration of her other qualities ;— if you wish to see Intelligence, Virtue, and the Graces, look at Miss Ornvile.”

Sir Esmond was so much accustomed to think of Miss Ornvile as a sister, that he forgot he praised her in the language of a lover, —but his words made a deep impression on Matilda, and for the first time, the poison of jealousy infused itself into her heart.

Her emotions were not observed by him ; the thoughts of his departure had previously lowered her spirits, and the increased sorrow he saw in her countenance the remainder of the evening, he attributed to the same cause, and was gratified by it.

* * * *

UPON Sir Esmond's arrival at Anson-House, he found the person with whom he came to negotiate, had been suddenly called to a distance, but was expected to return in a few days. This obliged him to remain longer in the country than he intended, and made him a week later in returning to town, than he had any expectation of being when he quitted it.

The instant he arrived, he went to Mrs. Fanbrook's full of joy at the prospect of seeing Matilda. As he entered the house, he was met by her mother, whom he rejoiced to find much recovered, but to his inquiries about her daughter, she answered only by saying she was in her dressing-room, and advancing hastily before him, opened the door

of the room, and softly said, "My dear, here is Sir Esmond."

Matilda was reclining on a sofa, with a handkerchief thrown over her face, but upon hearing her mother's words, she suddenly started up, and drawing aside the handkerchief, discovered a countenance pale and sorrowful. As Sir Esmond eagerly sprung forward, she looked at him earnestly for a moment, and immediately fainted.

"Gracious God!" he exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this? Has she been ill?"

"She has been alarmed by your long absence," replied Mrs. Fanbrook.

This answer calmed his fears, and he had soon the satisfaction of seeing her restored to life.

He informed her of the occurrence which had detained him in the country, and expressed the utmost regret for the anxiety it had occasioned her; while at the same time he

acknowledged that he felt delight from it, as a proof of her affection.

She anxiously listened to every word that he spoke ; again and again inquired about the circumstance which had detained him, as if she wished to be assured that business alone had been the cause of his absence, and appeared deeply affected by the expressions of his tenderness.

Sir Esmond, whose attachment to her had been heightened, rather than diminished by absence, was delighted by these proofs of her affection, and would have thought himself completely happy, could he have seen her face again illumined by smiles, as before their separation ; but her features continued overcast by an expression of sorrow, which he in vain endeavoured to remove. He imagined it was owing to the weakened state of her frame, and the anxiety she had suffered, the effects of which could not be immediately overcome ; but he trusted a few days would restore her to cheerfulness.

Several days, however, elapsed, without producing the effect he wished. A settled melancholy seemed to have taken possession of her ; her cheek was pale, her eye had lost its lustre, and though apparently more sensible than ever to his affection, it seemed to have no effect in lessening the sadness of her countenance.

Sir Esmond became alarmed ; he was persuaded she had some secret cause of unhappiness, and earnestly entreated to know what it was ?

She answered only by tears. With increased apprehension he conjured her to tell him, why she was thus affected ?

Several times she attempted to speak, but her perturbation increasing, he flew to Mrs. Fanbrook to request an explanation ; certain of hearing of some strange misfortune, yet wholly at a loss to conjecture what he had to dread.

Mrs. Fanbrook saw his distress with much

concern, and endeavoured to alleviate it by assuring him his apprehensions were greater than he had cause for. “Matilda, Sir,” continued she, “loves you with an enthusiasm suited to her nature, but most unfortunate for her situation. The mention of your journey to Kent, first awakened her to the full knowledge of her affection for you, and of the misfortunes which might result from it; your praises of Miss Orville added to her unhappiness by inspiring her with jealousy; and your failing to return at the time appointed, filled her with terror: she feared she was forgotten in more agreeable society, and grief and anxiety reduced her to the condition in which you found her.”

“But why,” cried Sir Esmond, “should her grief continue? Now that I am returned with even increased affection, why does not her sorrow die with its cause?”

“Because,” replied Mrs. Fanbrook, “its causes are more numerous than I have yet informed you. Jealousy was not the only consequence of your praises of Miss Orville; she

was struck with admiration of the woman you described,—compared herself with the picture you had drawn, and sunk in her own estimation by the comparison. A thousand times she repeated your encomiums of Miss Ornvill, adding, he may love, but he does not respect me ; it is my person he admires, but he forgets Miss Ornvill's appearance in admiration of her other qualities.

I told her it was impossible for you not to respect her.

He cannot respect me, she replied, for I expressed no disapprobation, on hearing him make a proposal, which I ought never to have listened to——Oh ! how I am fallen in my own estimation, since that moment !—He may now, perhaps, think that I have some good qualities, but how will he remember me hereafter, if he forsakes me for some Miss Ornvill ?

I endeavoured to persuade her that you would never forsake her.

Have you forgot, she asked, your pre-

paring me to expect he might become indifferent?—But can I ever be so?—How is my heart enchained!”

I entreated her for my sake to forbear such reflections; they pierced me to the heart, and added to the misery I always suffered from her situation, were more than I could support.

No sooner was this said, than I repented it, from the distress it threw her into; and she assured me in the most solemn manner, that amidst all the misery she suffered, she had a pleasure in loving you, which she would not relinquish for worlds.

Her anxieties are too deeply rooted to be easily subdued. She says there is but one remedy for her, which, however painful, she must submit to;—it is to leave you.”

“Leave me!” cried Sir Esmond, in amazement; “how could she think of it?”

“The being forsaken by you, or thought unworthy of your esteem, are the greatest dis-

trespasses, which, she thinks, can befall her, and a speedy separation, she fancies, is the only means of preventing them. I asked her how she could resolve on a measure which would be so afflicting to you? She answered it would make her extremely miserable, but she had no alternative from greater misfortune, for she should die of grief, were she to be forsaken or despised by you. No beings, she said, were so much to be pitied as the women who were mistresses to the men they loved. A forsaken wife could never be so great an object of compassion, as she might still have the regard of friends, and the consciousness of deserving her husband's esteem to support her; but what consolation could remain to an unfortunate mistress?

I told her that few of them felt as she would do in their situation.

The generality of them may not, she replied; but many of them, who have been seduced, may be amiable and deserving of esteem. Oh! how cruel are men!—how regardless of poor helpless women!

You, I said, were far from cruel, and would, I was persuaded, yet act virtuously.

But he cannot esteem me, she replied, since he thinks I would become his mistress, and I should sink into the earth with sorrow, if he should remember me hereafter only with pity.—I must deserve from him more; the intelligence and graces of Miss Orville, I cannot aspire too,—but her virtue I will emulate.”

Sir Esmond listened to Mrs. Fanbrook with the most anxious solicitude, but without the unhappiness which he at first had suffered; on the contrary, he rejoiced to find how easy it would be to banish every trace of uneasiness from Matilda, by immediate marriage.

But on returning to her, how great was his surprise, when instead of hearing his proposal with the satisfaction he expected, she melted into tears, and appeared overwhelmed with grief.

Sir Esmond astonished, entreated to know the cause of her sorrow?

“It is,” replied she, “because your generous design, makes me more than ever lament that it is impossible for us to marry.”

“Impossible ! Why ? How can it be impossible !”

“There are many objections to it, but it is enough that I should never forgive myself for having drawn you into marriage by pity for my distrefs.”

“It is I,” cried Sir Esmond, “who ought never to forgive myself for proposing to place you in a situation which is unworthy of you. Nothing, I am now sensible can excuse my conduct, but it may be some palliation of my error, that it was my firm determination to marry you in a very short time, if you would accept of my hand.”

“I always believed,” said Matilda, “that it was your intention to marry me some time hence, if circumstances should then render it proper ; but it is my sorrow alone, which

has led you to think of it at present : you shall never sacrifice yourself for me."

"Call it not a sacrifice ! Banish, I beseech you, every apprehension, and believe that the moment which makes you my wife, will be the happiest of my life."

"But how long will that happiness last ? May you not in a few months regret the act of a blind affection ?—How cruel it is that we can have no dependence on love !"

"How Matilda ! have you then no trust in your affection for me ?"

"Our situations are widely different."

"However different, my affection for you I believe is unalterable, and you have surely some cause to trust me."

"Dare you trust yourself without a longer trial of your affection ? Your visits to me have hitherto been voluntary, and you knew they could cease when you pleased ; but you know

not what effect the shackles of matrimony might produce. In your eyes I may have attractions, but have I the qualities you would wish in a wife ?”

“ I see no human being equal to you.”

“ Not even Miss Ornvile ?”

“ Not even Miss Ornvile. She is next to you ; and in her presence I became sensible of the injustice I did you by placing you in a situation to deprive you of such a friend. I will own, that before I went into Kent, I was so intoxicated with my happiness as to be forgetful of every thing else ; but the sight of her awakened me to a sense of my error, and made me wish that you were her sister in affection, as well as in merit. On my return I should instantly have proposed our marriage, had not my very love for you, made me anxious to keep you a few months unoccupied with the ceremonies of society. Let these acknowledgments convince you at once of my affection and esteem.”

“ Oh !” cried Matilda, “ that they had pre-

ceded your discovery of my present unhappiness,—then our marriage would have been easy ; but now, might you not in a moment of calm reflection, believe that my mother and I had laid a snare to entrap you ?”

“Impossible ! I can never suspect you of artifice ; your behaviour has always been too much the offspring of genuine feeling to admit of two interpretations.”

These assurances softened, without banishing the grief of Matilda, who prayed him to urge her no further on the subject, till she had reflected on it at leisure.

He complied, and for some days forbore to renew the conversation ; but perceiving her melancholy continue, he again, in the most earnest manner, besought her consent to their union.

With much agitation she confessed, that she had determined, if ever their marriage took place, it should not be until his confidence in her sincerity, and in the steadiness of his own

affection, should justify his marrying a woman who lay under so many disadvantages.

“What are those disadvantages?” asked Sir Esmond, impatiently: “Is there one of them of the smallest importance?”

“They may all be of importance in the opinion of your friends, and some of them are of the utmost to yourself. I have nothing to offer you but affection and integrity; and it is necessary you should be well assured of the latter before I become your wife.”

“You torture me by talking in this manner; how is it possible I can be more assured of your excellence than I am?”

“By time and separation. It is my wish to retire for a while with my mother into the country.”

“To leave me!”

“No,” replied Matilda, affected by his appearance; “I will not leave you, if you for-

bid it :—but, if you wish me to be in peace, you will consent to my departure.”

“ Why should I consent? What purpose can it possibly serve?”

“ It will enable me to respect myself. I regard your happiness too much to become your wife, and would respect the object of your affection too highly to permit her to be your mistress. The more I love, the more jealous and diffident I become of myself ;—I regard myself for your sake,—I would have the being you love perfect.”

“ You are perfect,—you are every thing I can wish.”

“ Can I trust opinions so much influenced by feeling?”

“ Do you not trust your own, Matilda? Are you not now suffering yourself to be guided entirely by feeling?”

“ O no! my feelings would lead me to be

always with you ; but I think it right we should part. My mother too, I see, though she is silent, approves my intention, and therefore I am not guided entirely by my own judgment. Six or eight months absence will allow you time for reflection, and convince you of my disinterested anxiety for your happiness, when I can hazard the loss of you by so long a separation."

"Can you truly love me, and have the resolution to leave me?"

"If I had but the power of expressing how dear you are to me, you would not ask such a question.—I shall be miserable; but your esteem is more necessary to my happiness than your society."

"You know not how wretched you are going to make me; do you not see that my whole soul is yours?"

"O! that it may be thus six months hence! By a single look, I shall then discover if your heart is still unchanged."

“ If you should see me indifferent ?”

“ Do not speak of it.”

“ If I should not only be indifferent, but married to another ?”

Matilda made no answer, but her varying colour eloquently expressed her feelings.

Sir Esmond was penetrated with grief, on seeing the pain he had given her, and in the tenderest language implored her forgiveness.

“ I will forgive you,” she replied, “ but do not again exercise your power ; the very possibility of your marrying another gives me an anguish I cannot describe : I cannot expose you to the same suffering.”

“ How greatly you are mistaken ! Were you to appear in the world, you would immediately be besieged by thousands, in a manner that would distract me.”

“ One successful rival could as effectually

ally destroy my peace as thousands: but none can ever excite your fear of me, for I am more than indifferent to every other man; when absent from you, I wish to shut my eyes, and see no image in imagination but yourself."

"Whether absent or with you, Matilda, I see no being but you."

"My mother tells me, that men feel very differently from women; they fly to amusement, to relieve their care; and the variety of their occupations soon banish from their breast the softer feelings."

"My heart, then, is framed as a woman's; for, without you, all occupations are insipid. It is death to part from you."

"Our separation will, I hope, be temporary; we part now, that we may be happy hereafter."

"I cannot compel you, Matilda,—I cannot even wish you to remain with me against your inclination; but, without you, how can I exist!"

* * * *

SIR Esmond seeing it would be impossible to detain Matilda with any satisfaction to herself, unless he could effect a change in her sentiments, endeavoured in the most earnest manner to interest her mother in his favour.

He told her how firmly it had been his determination to marry her daughter, from the moment he was acquainted with her story, and fully explained his motives for delaying his marriage, while at the same time he highly condemned his conduct. It was most ungenerous, he said, to make her happiness depend upon him in the manner he had done; but presuming on the partiality that Mrs. Fanbrook said she felt for him, and upon the rectitude of his intentions, he had allowed himself to be hurried away by his

feelings, to an extent he should ever regret. He concluded by imploring her intercession with Matilda for the speedy accomplishment of their marriage.

Mrs. Fanbrook showed real concern for his unhappiness, yet could not be prevailed upon to grant his request; declaring that Matilda was so much convinced of the propriety of delaying their union, that she should think it wrong to oppose her.

“Her objections are so imaginary,” replied Sir Esmond, “that it cannot be right to yield to them.”

“I do not think them imaginary,” returned Mrs. Fanbrook; “she certainly ought not to let you rashly precipitate yourself into a marriage which may be thought imprudent.”

“Would you then wait,” cried he, impatiently, “till I am calm enough to be indifferent whether I marry or not?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Fanbrook, with an

indulgent smile, “but I should certainly wish you to wait till you can have a little more confidence in yourself, and in her. Is there a person who might not suspect her distress was a contrivance to inveigle you? Who might not even suppose our whole story a fabrication?”

“The circumstances of it would carry conviction to any mind.”

“Not solely on our own authority, for how easy is it for artful women to contrive a plausible tale?”

“But if I am satisfied, of what importance is it what others think?”

“Of the greatest, both to you and your wife. Were the Ornvile family to be told that you had married a girl, whose mother offered her to you as a mistress, and that after she herself had agreed to live with you as such, her virtuous scruples became suddenly so great as to oblige you to marry her, what

would they think either of the mother or daughter?"

"There would be no occasion for their knowing circumstances, which would give rise to unjust suspicion."

"It might be impossible to conceal some that would require explanation; besides, would you have your wife's credit depend on the concealment of her history?"

"I would have it rest upon her merit, and am certain wherever you and she appear, you will be respected."

"Am I to trust to the opinion of a young man strongly influenced by passion? It must be our care to deserve respect by our conduct. We are still strangers even to you, and wholly unknown in the world, and I should be very sorry were Matilda to marry you, while her behaviour could be supposed artful and selfish. Had you proposed marriage before you went into Kent, how joyfully should I have consented!"

“ Our marriage may then be delayed for a time, but let her not leave me in the mean while; that would surely be unnecessary cruelty.”

“ She is convinced it is right, and I am too much of her opinion to oppose her.”

“ You allow yourself then, to be governed by chimerical scruples ?”

“ I do not think them such.”

“ You do not certainly think it material what are the precise number of weeks or months she remains as she has hitherto been situated? She cannot expect by removal, to preserve her reputation. The time I have devoted to her, your having no visitor but myself, the very means which my anxiety for her safety made me pursue, and a thousand occurrences which I have not, perhaps, been sufficiently careful to prevent, have drawn upon her all the obloquy of the situation she dreads.”

“ She is aware of this, but at present, her credit has no share in her concern. Reputation is desirable, but Reputation is not Virtue; and it is to be deplored how many women think, that when character is once lost, they have nothing farther to regard.”

“ Matilda’s conduct is very different; it springs from the real spirit of virtue; and, as I am satisfied of this, you ought either to prevail on her to marry me, or to remain with me till she does. Her situation has not lately been objected to by you.”

“ When I thought myself dying, and was surrounded with dangers, I conceived myself to be under the sad necessity of giving you Matilda, to save her from a much greater calamity; but from that moment, peace was a stranger to my mind; and it has since required the constant recollection of the horrors from which she was snatched, to enable me to support with any degree of composure, the misfortune to which she still was exposed. I saw, however, that you were too much prepossessed against me to believe in what I

said; and I feared, that if, by farther expostulation and entreaty, I appeared to distrust the solemn promise you had given that we should never have cause to reproach you, I should only strengthen your belief in my selfishness, without more effectually securing your just consideration of Matilda, when I should be no more.—Even after I became considerably better, my frame continued too feeble for me not to fear a speedy, if not a sudden dissolution; but at all events, I was not in a state to protect her, and I could only console myself with the hope that the worth of Matilda would soon make its due impression on your mind, and lead you to do justice to her, and to yourself.—These hopes were cherished by your behaviour, before you went to Kent, and I only waited your return to make another and effectual attempt to alter your intentions respecting her. But a change in your views has been effected in a manner, which, though it puts an end to the chief cause of my affliction, makes our conduct liable to such misinterpretation, as must prevent, for the present, the full accomplishment of my wishes, in seeing her your wife.”

“ But though you will not permit her to be my wife, I still cannot see why you should now, as we are situated, wish our separation.”

“ In the regulation of conduct,” replied Mrs. Fanbrook, “ there are two things which should always be kept in view; the first is the approbation of our own conscience;—the second, the effect which our actions may have as an example to others. Though I have always hoped that you would marry Matilda, yet till now it was uncertain, and if forsaken by you, I considered her as devoted to a life of obscurity,—unnoticed, and unknown, I thought she would pass through life seeking contentment in peace of mind, and the exercise of goodness in private; but now, that she is certainly to be your wife, every circumstance of her conduct becomes of importance, both for your sake, and from the place which your fortune will give her in society. Her continuing with you, therefore, under the appearance of your mistress would be highly improper.”

“ But since she has already incurred the odium, the allowing the mistake to continue a few months longer can be of no importance.”

“ Should we persevere in a fault,” said Mrs. Fanbrook, “ because it is committed, or is it of no importance to what degree we err?—The cruel situation of Matilda, driven to the alternative of choosing the least among many evils, may palliate conduct in her and her unhappy mother, which were otherwise inexcusable; but if, when she is Lady Anson, her character should be respectable, may not the belief of her having previously been your mistress, afford a kind of sanction to others to form similar connexions much less justifiable?—Strict rules of conduct are absolutely necessary to the welfare of society, as the only means of preventing those inroads of vice, which weakness of mind, and violence of passion, would otherwise perpetually occasion, even among those who wish to do right, for *few can judge, though all can imitate.*

It is in this view that I have so constantly opposed your making those excursions with Matilda, which you have so often proposed. For her sake, I was averse to her appearing with you, since she must be regarded as your mistress, but I was no less desirous for yours,

to prevent your being seen with her. When a wicked or contemptible man appears publicly with his mistress, he only exposes himself to the contempt he deserves; but when a respectable character, by some strange deviation from what is right, acts in the same manner, he does a real injury to society, by encouraging the vicious in a disregard of decorum; misleading the young and thoughtless; and wounding the feelings, and repressing the spirit of virtue in respectable women.

Whether, therefore, I listen to the dictates of my feelings, or of my judgment, I cannot too earnestly wish to see her removed from a situation, which does injustice to her own character, and may have the most dangerous influence on that of others."

"All this may be very right in you," cried Sir Esmond, "but surely Matilda is not guided by views of public utility! Her motives for separation are imaginary in the extreme, and her feelings altogether changed; I have hardly seen a smile upon her face, since my return from Kent."

“ Before your departure,” said Mrs. Fanbrook, “ she was happy with you, not merely from affection, but in the persuasion that she would soon be your wife. What we had seen of your disposition, and heard of your character, gave her the conviction, as it did me, that you only delayed your marriage till you had an opportunity of knowing that you were not deceived in us ; and as we had no discovery to dread, she imagined it would not be long before your doubts would be removed. But no sooner did your praises of Miss Ornvill lead her to view herself with the eyes of another, than she became unhappy, and believed that she was far below the excellence which her love of you and of virtue, made her equally ambitious of attaining.

When her jealousy of Miss Ornvill ceased, her admiration of her increased, and she regarded with enthusiasm the woman on whom you could bestow such exalted encomiums. Her mind was incessantly employed about her, and no sacrifice she would have thought too great to render herself equally worthy of your esteem.

How, said she, can I be a moment easy in a state which Miss Ornvile would condemn? She would think me unworthy of all regard.

I told her that Miss Ornvile would not think her unworthy if she was acquainted with her story.

But still, replied Matilda, she could not associate with me, and would think that if I felt as I ought, I could not remain with Sir Esmond. He is sensible of this; he says my situation must deprive me of her as a friend, but it was her virtues which made him reflect on this. He has talked to me of my beauty, but is that praise? The most profligate or insignificant woman may have beauty.— Could he speak of the intelligence, the virtue of Matilda, I should be too happy!”

“How much have I been mistaken,” said Sir Esmond; “since she had given me her affection, I thought I could not be more secure of her, but neither regard to her own happiness, nor mine, can make her deviate from what she imagines right. For this she sacri-

fices our present, and hazards her future happiness, for I am now in her power, but she does not know what change separation may produce. What romantic conduct is this!"

"It may be termed romantic, but will not on reflection, appear inconsistent with our knowledge of human nature. Of all passions, love has been the most frequently misunderstood and unjustly depreciated; owing partly to a variety of other attachments usurping its name, and partly to its effects being extremely dependent on the character of the person who loves, and yet more on that of the beloved object. Genuine love always leads us to assimilate ourselves to the person we love, and is therefore, when well placed, not only a source of the truest happiness, but capable of producing the most admirable effects upon the character. It has been known to reform suddenly men of very licentious manners, and its influence over women is yet greater than upon men. When you consider this, the conduct of Matilda will not appear surprising, though it may be gratifying as a proof of her love and esteem.

If instead of speaking to her as you did of Miss Ornvile, you had brought women of inferior character about her, and seemed indifferent to superior qualities; her state of mind might now have been very different from what it is. Without the aid of love, the power of example at her age is great, and even at a much later period, the generality of people are insensibly affected by the company they keep; though this is seldom sufficiently attended to.

How many fathers have I heard speak in the presence of their daughters, with lenity, or as they called it with good nature, of misconduct in women, at which in their own daughters, they would have felt the highest indignation; not considering that the sentiments they expressed before them, and the example of the woman whose errors they palliated, might have infinitely more effect in relaxing their conduct, than parental authority could have in restraining it. No man should countenance in another, what he would not forgive in his wife or daughter.—If you, Sir, wish to form a true judgment of Matilda's conduct, think how you would choose your daughter to

act in her situation. If you do this, I believe you will not hesitate to approve of her leaving you."

Sir Esmond did not yield easily to Mrs. Fanbrook's reasoning, but he found that he could no longer oppose the wishes of her and her daughter. Since argument failed to persuade, supplication was unnecessary; for Matilda had repeatedly declared, that she would never leave him without his consent, although she must be unhappy in remaining with him.

But soon all concern for himself, was lost in anxiety for them. Mrs. Fanbrook's health though much recovered, had never been restored, and he had often been alarmed at the symptoms of weakness that appeared, which he imputed to the shock her constitution had received at Mrs. Sorell's; but when he discovered through Matilda, that her ill health was to be attributed to unceasing unhappiness about her daughter, and that since her removal from Mrs. Sorell's, though she had never suffered the kind of misery she had experienced there; yet that she had been from that instant

a total stranger to the peace of mind, which she had occasionally felt before, he was struck deep with remorse. He viewed his conduct not only as ungenerous, but cruel. His attachment to Matilda was sufficient to interest him deeply in Mrs. Fanbrook, but her own manners had excited his admiration, and won his regard ; and when he reflected on the arguments she had urged for his separation from her daughter, he could not help being impressed with the highest respect for her character, from the justness of her views, and the rectitude of her principles.

He no longer wished Matilda to live with him, but as his wife. He was anxious to soften by every means in his power the sorrows of Mrs. Fanbrook, and to cherish the virtuous feelings of her daughter. The more he reflected on them, the more he admired—the more he loved her, and the happier he was in her affection,—and condemned himself for the highest imprudence, as well as injustice, in having proposed to place her in a situation, which might tarnish the purity of her mind, or weaken the force of *those principles*, which

he now felt, rendered her affection infinitely gratifying to him, and gave that dependence on her conduct which could *alone* be a security for permanent happiness.

He consented to her retiring to the country, and promised that for half a year he would make no attempt to see her contrary to her wishes. He chose Hampstead for the place of her abode, from its vicinity to town, and being the residence of his uncle in autumn, at whose house he could be near her without exciting observation. She was settled there in September, and he has never seen her since. He hears of her regularly by her mother, whom he frequently meets by appointment in a walk, and by her is informed that Matilda, though anxious and melancholy, is busily employed in reading the books that at her own request, have been recommended by her mother and himself for her improvement.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. ALMORNE perused the narrative of Sir Esmond with much attention, and found no difficulty in forming an opinion of Matilda and her mother.

On meeting with Mr. Anson in the morning, he anxiously inquired what she thought of them?

“From the beginning of the story,” she replied, “I had little doubt of their worth, but their last act seems to leave it unquestionable, and gives both of them a title to that esteem, which Matilda is so ambitious of deserving.”

“I am extremely happy,” said Mr. Anson,

“that you entertain so favourable an opinion of them, for whatever Matilda may be, Esmond’s happiness is now entirely dependant upon her. Their separation, and the remorse he suffered for his conduct, affected his spirits to a degree that alarmed me extremely, and made me anxiously inquire the cause, which he frankly acknowledged. Though from his account, I thought very highly of Matilda, yet I was not sorry she had withdrawn, as it would give him time to make a trial both of her and of himself; but I very soon changed my opinion, for he continued so unhappy, that I should gladly have seen his marriage take place immediately, and in considering how it could best be accelerated, it occurred to me, that no means was so likely to overcome the objections of Matilda, as your being interested in her favour. She would consider you as an impartial judge, and if you approved of their marriage, would probably be guided by your opinion. I wrote to you, therefore, to request a visit, not intending to inform him of my design, till I should know your sentiments, but on being taken ill I could not conceal it, and the joy with which he

heard my proposal, made me extremely happy I had thought of it."

"It will give me the truest pleasure," said Mrs. Almorne, "if it is in my power to serve him."

"He has great dependence on your power, and wondered he had not thought of you himself. The suasive Mrs. Almorne, he said, would not only obviate the scruples of Matilda, but be the very friend of whom both she and her mother stand in need, to give them confidence in themselves on their introduction into the world. The goodness, the justness, the consistency of conduct, which had so uniformly marked the life of Mrs. Almorne, made her approbation——"

"Stop, my friend," interrupted Mrs. Almorne, "you must not repeat the extravagant expressions of a young man under a sudden impulse of joy."

"Well then," said Mr. Anson, "I will not say what we both think, but we know how

much we may depend on your friendship, and if you can prevail upon Matilda to shorten the time of separation, you will indeed relieve him from much unhappiness, for it is only in seeing her and her mother restored to tranquillity, that he can be in peace. He now severely condemns every part of his conduct to them. When the safety of an innocent girl could possibly be in danger, he says, he ought never for a moment to have listened to the suggestions of a Mrs. Sorell. Of Mrs. Fanbrook's sufferings from his refusal to comply with her request, he cannot think without misery ; nor of the consequences which might have followed it, without horror. I have frequently endeavoured to soften his regret, by mentioning the various circumstances which contributed to mislead him, and sometimes I have succeeded ; but if on meeting with Mrs. Fanbrook, she appeared a little paler than usual, he returned home wretched.

To all this distress has been added the idle anxieties of a lover. When we were at Hampstead, he was never easy a moment, if he was not walking at the dwelling of

Matilda, lest some accident should happen to her. Here, though he hears from her mother daily, he is in perpetual dread of a rival, and blames himself for not having placed her in a more retired situation. I told him that she must be unworthy of regard, if she was capable of deserting him. He said he had no fear of her forsaking him, but of her seeing another that she might think more agreeable. I asked if she admitted visitors? No; but by his own desire she spent much time abroad in taking exercise, and could not be seen without becoming the object of pursuit; he should never be in peace till he had a legal claim to protect her. I found it was in vain to reason with him, and was obliged to leave him to the enjoyment of his fears."

"I venture to hope," said Mrs. Almorne, "that it will really be in my power to restore to him Matilda. Has he never thought of making inquiries about Mrs. Fanbrook or others? As her husband was in the army, it might not be difficult to obtain information."

"I suggested it, but he said unless it were

to gratify me, he would never make the attempt, as it would distress him extremely to betray the smallest distrust of her."

The entrance of Sir Esmond prevented Mrs. Almorne's replying.

He advanced to her with much anxiety in his countenance, but the reception she gave him immediately relieved his fears.

"Your smiles, Madam," said he, as she held out her hand to him, "are the harbingers of peace; they say every thing I wish."

"They promise at least," said Mrs. Almorne, "that nothing shall be left undone by me, for your happiness."

"When I knew your goodness so well, I wonder I did not sooner rest my hopes on it; you are always the consoler of the afflicted."

"You will not, I trust, be long of that number," replied Mrs. Almorne. "I am almost as much in love with Matilda, as yourself; I

respect her mother, and hope they cannot withstand our joint solicitations. When can I see Mrs. Fanbrook? it is through her I must approach her daughter."

"To-day I hope. If you will permit me, I will go immediately and request her to receive a visit from you? But I should previously inform you, that she is not entirely unacquainted with you. Anxious to prepare her for our design, I told her two days ago, that Mr. Anson was in expectation of a visit from a lady, whom I wished she knew, and upon telling her who it was, she said she was no stranger to your character. I asked, if it did not inspire her with a desire to meet with you? She answered, that her misfortunes precluded such a wish, and then made inquiries, which showed, that though acquainted with your character, she was totally ignorant of your situation. I wished to urge a meeting with you, but she appeared so disturbed, I thought it an improper time to press the subject, supposing that it was her misfortunes that affected her; but on reflection I rather

think it was the mention of you, for on the first sound of your name she changed colour, and betrayed an agitation she very seldom discovers."

"It is strange that the mention of me should thus affect her ;—but Fanbrook is a fictitious name ; can you tell me her real one ?"

"Arnvale."

"Arnvale !" repeated Mrs. Almorne, with surprise, "are you certain of it ?"

"Perfectly certain : it was her husband's name ; her own was Balfour."

"Then I know her ! certainly know her ! and she is all that you can wish !"

"You raise me to heaven !" cried Sir Esmond, "but repeat your words, for I fear some sad mistake."

"There is no mistake ; I remember Matilda well, when she was but seven years old."

"Could I believe in this, my happiness would be too great!"

"It will indeed be great; but gracious heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Almorne, while the tears flowed down her cheek, "has Mrs. Arnvale been suffering such misery from poverty, while I have been rolling in affluence!"

"What happiness!" cried Sir Esmond, "will Mrs. Arnvale feel in being restored to such a friend as you! Her sorrows and Matilda's will now be at an end, and their merit evinced to Mr. Anson."

"Of their merit, my dear Esmond," said Mr. Anson, "I never had a doubt, yet my joy at this discovery is little inferior to your own."

"How constantly, my dear Sir, do you lay me under obligations! it is to your kind solicitude, I owe my present felicity."

"Think not of the little share I have had

in promoting your happiness, but hasten to restore peace to Mrs. Fanbrook; Mrs. Almorne will tell you how to conduct yourself."

"Tell her," said Mrs. Almorne, "exactly what has passed since my arrival in town; it may be a satisfaction to her to know that I esteemed Mrs. Fanbrook, before I knew her as Mrs. Arnvale."

"How has it happened," said Mr. Anson, "that in all her distresses she never thought of applying to you, who have the wish, with the power to do good?"

"You find she was a stranger to my situation, and I fear does not consider me as a friend, for we were known to each other chiefly through the medium of others. She was sister-in-law to my friend Mrs. Balfour, who spoke of her in the highest terms, and showed me many of her letters, but I never saw her but once, when she visited me at Mrs. Balfour's desire. She was then accompanied by Matilda, on her way from Ludlow to join

her husband in a distant part of the country, and at my particular request passed two days with me at Mount Almorne. Her unsettled life, and the death of Mrs. Balfour soon after made me lose all knowledge of her, and it is very probable she does not imagine that she is either remembered or esteemed by me. Our meeting now, will be a sad one, for we cannot forget the days that are past,—but hasten to her, Sir Esmond, and tell her that I wait most impatiently to embrace her.”

CHAPTER III.

SINCE Sir Esmond's separation from Matilda, he had never been in Mrs. Arnvale's house at Hampstead; but he thought he might now venture thither, after sending a note previously by a servant, to inform her of his coming.

She received him without the knowledge of Matilda, and with much inquietude as to the cause of his unexpected visit.

He relieved her uneasiness immediately, by assuring her he was the messenger of agreeable tidings; but when he proceeded to mention Mrs. Almoré, her countenance again became clouded by anxiety; and on discovering that Mrs. Almoré was informed of her story, her agitation became so great, that it was with difficulty he could compose or per-

suade her, that Mrs. Almorne's esteem for Mrs. Arnvale was not lost in her knowledge of Mrs. Fanbrook.

When she was a little re-assured, she confessed it was strange that she should feel such unhappiness at the thoughts of Mrs. Almorne's knowing of her history ; "but," added she, "equivocal situations are ever painful, and the approbation of those we esteem is indispensable to our peace !"

"Permit me," said Sir Esmond, "to remove every shadow of uneasiness you can have, by bringing Mrs. Almorne here ; a look from her will banish all your anxieties."

Mrs. Arnvale begged the meeting might be delayed for a day, till she should recover some firmness ; but Sir Esmond, persuaded that delay would only prolong her disquiet, prevailed upon her at length to grant his request.

He hastened to town with the utmost expedition ; and, in as short a time as the dis-

tance would permit, returned with Mrs. Almorne, whom he conducted to the room where Mrs. Arnvale waited to receive her, and immediately withdrew.

Mrs. Arnvale felt much perturbation on the entrance of Mrs. Almorne, but the behaviour of the latter soon abated her uneasiness. She showed her such kindness, blended with so much respect; discovered such sympathy in her misfortunes, with tenderness to the memory of the friend they had mutually lost, that Mrs. Arnvale's apprehensions yielded at length to pleasing emotions.

The mild dignity of Mrs. Almorne's appearance, the goodness that irradiated her countenance, and the gentleness of her manners, gradually inspired Mrs. Arnvale with peace and confidence, and she gratefully acknowledged that she experienced from their meeting, a satisfaction of which she had believed herself incapable.

She likewise confessed the anxiety with which she had met her; for though she ex-

pected the most favourable interpretation of her conduct, yet she had found her own mind so unexpectedly influenced by the pressure of misfortune, that she could hardly suppose Mrs. Almorne could acquit her of error, unless she had experienced similar distresses.

“ The forcible representation given of them by Sir Esmond,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ left me no hesitation in forming a just opinion of you and of your daughter.”

“ Yet I cannot imagine.” replied Mrs. Arnvale, “ that a young man like him, could form an adequate conception of them. It is a vulgar and trite remark, that one half of the world does not know how the other lives; but the truth of it I have experienced in a manner, of which, till lately, I had no idea. Although all my life a stranger to affluence, I little conceived the scenes of poverty and wretchedness I have recently seen; nor could I imagine the peculiar misery to which persons accustomed to polished society may be exposed, by that extreme poverty which throws them out of their station,” and reduces them

to the necessity of constantly witnessing the condition of the lowest class of people. The ignorance, meanness, and depravity of many of them; the penury, helplessness, and wretchedness of others, contrasted with the gaiety and splendour always to be seen in London, presented the most melancholy and mortifying pictures of human life. But when I turned from the contemplation of them, to the consideration of my child, I cannot express the anguish I suffered.—Dear as she was to me, her death would have been a blessing, when I saw the horrible evils to which she was exposed.

Anxious to secure for her the little that we had remaining, I subsisted for some time almost on bread and water, till my strength was considerably impaired. But in whatever way I lived, the prospect of want, from the expenses of life increasing, seemed inevitable. Never shall I forget the heart sickness which has often overcome me, at the mention of a new tax!—Our poverty and misery are now over; but their effects on myself, I may never recover.”

“ I lament deeply,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ both for your sake and Sir Esmond’s, the error of his conduct, which has been very inconsistent with his character, but his remorse is great.”

“ There were many circumstances to plead in his excuse,” replied Mrs. Arnvale, “ and one of them was, his having, in some degree, lost his respect for marriage, by seeing the defects of the institution ; so hazardous is it to allow youthful passions the smallest pretext for being the regulators of moral conduct ;— but he is now sufficiently aware of the danger of temporising with established duties.”

“ No circumstance,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ can excuse the conduct of Sir Esmond. In consideration of his remorse, I have not fully declared my disapprobation of it either to his uncle or himself ; but it has mortified and grieved me.”

“ But how many young men of fashion, placed in circumstances similar to Sir Esmond’s, would have behaved so well as he did ?”

“ Were the example of others,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ to afford a justification of his faults, he would find much in the conduct not only of his own sex, but of ours. What man is worse received in female society, for being guilty of seduction, or notorious for having what are called affairs of gallantry?—How many husbands, who have driven their wives into vice by their brutality or profligacy, are treated graciously by our sex? How many, even respectable women, have I seen express the utmost indignation, and feel horror at the idea of having the least intercourse with a kept-mistress, without the smallest inquiry into the circumstances, which placed her in the unfortunate situation; while, the next minute, they would associate without scruple with dissolute men!—How few women, in fine, have distinguished themselves by a just disapprobation of the wanderings of men? unless, indeed, it can be the means of punishing the unfortunate women with whom they are connected. A Lord Anrose will suffer neglect, because he cannot on every occasion, be received without his wife; but had he not married Lady Anrose, he might

have had numerous gallantries both with single and married women, without risk of correction from the delicate consciences of females!—Men have found or fancied it their interest to allow themselves certain liberties, and women most obsequiously support their iniquities. Did we not daily see numerous instances of it, the effect which custom produces in hardening the hearts, and blinding the understandings of human beings, would hardly appear credible!

I shall never reflect on the miseries you have suffered, without the deepest regret; aggravated by the pain of knowing that it would have been easy for me to have prevented them. May I not reproach you for not remembering me in your distresses?"

"I have almost been reproaching myself for it, but I was extremely mistaken in your situation, and was far, very far from supposing myself intitled to your consideration. I had not heard of you for eleven years, before Sir Esmond spoke of you, and awakened

me to recollections which I thought were more blunted than I find them to be. Till the springs within us are touched, we little know the feelings of which we are susceptible."

"The remembrance of our last meeting," said Mrs. Almorne, "is stealing so fast upon me, that I must beg of you to banish it by the sight of Matilda. Does she know of our interview?"

"She does, but not all the causes of it. I told her that Sir Esmond had been here to prepare me for a visit from a lady, who had been the most intimate friend of her aunt. She interrupted me eagerly, to ask how you knew the place of my abode? I answered by Sir Esmond, whose relation you were, which I did not know till to-day. I informed her of a few other particulars, but was too full of anxiety to explain the design of your visit."

"Much comfort yet awaits you, I trust, in her prosperity, and I hope she will now have

no objection to marrying Sir Esmond immediately.

“ She can no longer have a scruple ; and I own their separation has made them both so unhappy, that I began to think it ought not to continue. I shall go and prepare her to see you.”

“ Tell her that I am not only the maternal friend of Sir Esmond, but the adopted mother of Miss Orville, whom I am impatient to introduce to her as a sister.”

After a short absence, Mrs. Arnvale returned alone, saying, Matilda was too much overcome by joy and timidity to be able to appear till she was a little composed.

“ I will go to her,” said Mrs. Almorne ; “ it will be easier for her than to come to me, and her agitation will hardly decrease till we meet.”

Mrs. Arnvale gladly assented, and led the way to her daughter, who sunk almost over-

powered with emotion, on finding herself in the arms of Mrs. Almorne.

When she was a little revived, Mrs. Almorne endeavoured to tranquillize her by speaking of the esteem she had for her mother, and the regard she had for the memory of her aunt; declaring it would be one of the most agreeable events of her life, if she could have an opportunity of showing to her and to her mother, the gratitude she owed to Mrs. Balfour.

She then spoke of Sir Esmond, expressing her earnest hope that she had no longer any objection to their union.

Matilda replied that she had never opposed it, but from anxiety for his happiness; and now he was convinced of the integrity of her mother, and could marry her with the approbation of his uncle, she had not the least wish to delay it.

Mrs. Almorne assured her of the entire approbation of Mr. Anson, in whom she would

find a father, and hoped she would always regard her as a mother.

“I will regard you, Madam,” said Matilda, emphatically, “as a guardian angel! It is by you we are all restored to peace!”

“Complete then my satisfaction,” returned Mrs. Almorne, “by permitting me to send Sir Esmond to hear from yourself your decision; he anxiously waits the result of our meeting.”

Matilda offering no objection, Mrs. Almorne bid her kindly adieu.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. ANSON being unable to wait on Mrs. Arnvale and Matilda at Hampstead, they visited him in town, when Sir Esmond had the satisfaction of hearing him declare it was impossible that any person could see them, without being convinced of their excellence.

Sir Esmond was extremely desirous his marriage should immediately take place in a private manner, and be kept secret till Mr. Anson was able to make a visit at Ornaville Abbey, where he wished it should first be made known, as the best way of making so great a change of situation easy to the timid Matilda, and the most agreeable plan that could be adopted for himself.

Mrs. Almorne and Mr. Anson highly ap-

proved of the proposal, which, on various accounts, was particularly agreeable to Mrs. Arnvale and Matilda.

It was therefore settled, that the marriage should be privately performed, and concealed till Mr. Anson was able to go into Kent, when they should make a visit both at Ornville Abbey and Delvin Lodge before they went to Anson House, where Mrs. Almorne would accompany them, and remain till the congratulatory visits of the neighbours were over.

This arrangement was no sooner made, than a special licence was procured, and the ceremony performed at Mr. Anson's, with such secrecy as not to be suspected by any person who was not present ; Mrs. and Miss Arnvale being considered by Mr. Anson's servants merely as the friends and visitors of Mrs. Almorne.

The name of Fanbrook was entirely dropped, the house at Hampstead given up, and Matilda and her mother settled in one in town, not far from Mr. Anson's.

On the marriage-day, Sir Esmond presented his wife with an irrevocable deed of four hundred pounds *per annum* in favour of her mother, expressing, at the same time, his earnest wish that Mrs. Arnvale would always reside with her daughter.

The joy with which Matilda received his gift, was damped by her mother's refusal to accept of it, who, though full of gratitude to Sir Esmond, declared it was superfluous, if she resided with her daughter, and too much, if she separated from her.

Sir Esmond was distressed and mortified by her refusal, but could not prevail upon her to change her resolution, till Mr. Anson and Mrs. Almorne joined in supporting his request, insisting it was proper that she should be made entirely independent.

She then consented to receive a smaller settlement; but Sir Esmond resisted her entreaties to make any alteration, saying, that though he trusted she would never separate from her daughter, he wished her to have a

fund for benevolent purposes always at command ; while, at the same time, he hoped that she would consider his purse as her own.

This act completed the happiness of Matilda, who felt that she could not have enjoyed tranquillity, had there remained the remotest chance of her mother's being again exposed to pecuniary distresses.

CHAPTER V.

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MRS. ALMORNE was but a few days in town, before she had the satisfaction of seeing Sir Esmond's embarrassments happily terminated. She had not in the mean time been unmindful of the other objects of her concern, but had seized the first favourable opportunity of speaking to him of Valmonsor, of whose situation with Constantia she gave him all the information which she thought necessary to explain to him, and interest him in her views.

He entered into them with all the warmth she could wish, and told her it would be easy for him to bring Valmonsor to an explanation of his conduct, as he had received a letter from him on his leaving Ramsgate, which gave him an opportunity of inquiring into his situation.

“ His letter,” said Sir Esmond,” was only a few hurried lines, informing me of his departure, and earnestly entreating that I would write to him soon, and give him all the intelligence I could of the Orville family, in whose welfare, he said, he was more interested than he had then either leisure or spirits to explain. This letter excited my concern, and determined me to inquire into his affairs, with the view of serving him ; and I will now write to him in a way that must immediately produce the eclairecissement you wish.”

This intelligence was extremely pleasing to Mrs. Almorne, and encouraged her to hope that her wishes respecting Valmonsor would soon be accomplished in a manner the most satisfactory.

She inquired of Sir Esmond, if he knew any thing of Valmonsor's situation which could lead them to guess his intentions, but he could give her no information on the subject. He said he knew nothing more, than that he had heard him say, that he was too poor to marry ; the recollection of which, on receiving his

letter, had made him blame himself extremely for not having thought of promoting him in the army.

“ With my fortune,” said Sir Esmond, “ this would have been so trifling an act of friendship, that I cannot pardon myself the omission ; but we had not met for years when I saw him in June, and my mind was then so much occupied, as to prevent my thinking of him in the manner I should have done. I fear that he has little more than, or perhaps nothing but his commission, which has probably been the chief cause of his behaviour to Miss Orville ; but whatever may have been the circumstances that embarrassed him, however ill-judged or unfortunate his conduct has been, it must have proceeded entirely from an error of judgment. I am convinced of this, both from my knowledge of the man, and because an opposite line of conduct would have been so evidently conducive to his own happiness.”

“ I have much confidence in your opinion of him,” said Mrs. Almoré, “ but your latter

argument has not much weight with me, as I have often seen men sacrifice their present comfort, and leave women in miserable suspense, merely from a fear of incommoding themselves with fetters, which might afterwards prove inconvenient."

"It is too true," replied Sir Esmond, "and I have seen such men deservedly punished, by losing the object of their affection; but Valmonsor's character is too excellent to leave any room for suspicion of such selfish conduct in him, and I am persuaded you will in a very short time be convinced that he is all you can wish."

These assurances gave the greatest satisfaction to Mrs. Almorne, who having thus finished her business in town, would instantly have returned to Ornvile, had she not been unwilling to leave Mrs. Arnvale, whose health was in a precarious state.

She remained some days on her account, and would have postponed her departure still longer, had not she and Mr. Hauway received

letters from Altona, which made them anxious that Frederic should immediately be at liberty to come to town.

On Mr. Hanway's return from the country, she had conversed with him about Frederic, and his conversation had strengthened the impressions his letters had given her of the Alderton family, while the accounts from Altona, made them more than ever deplore Frederic's unfortunate connexion with them.

Mr. Hanway wrote to him to urge his immediate return to town, without assigning the cause of his request, but mentioned that Mrs. Almorne would set out for Ornaville the following day.

Frederic lost not a moment in complying with Mr. Hanway's request, and as Mrs. Almorne left town at the time she proposed, they passed each other on the road.

Before her departure from London, she endeavoured to prevail on Philip Ornaville to accompany her to the Abbey, and pass some

days at least, with his father and mother, as a visit from him would afford them much pleasure, and alleviate their regret for the loss of Frederic; but he pleaded engagements which obliged him to remain in town.

CHAPTER VI.

THE return of Mrs. Almorne diffused a beam of joy over Ornville Abbey.

In Lady Ornville's happy hours there were many persons as agreeable to her as Mrs. Almorne, but in sorrow there was none on whom she could lean for comfort with so much confidence and satisfaction.

Mrs. Almorne had the pleasure to find her less unhappy than when she left her, and Sir John considerably better. The shock their feelings had received from their eldest son, was softened by the time which had elapsed since his visit, and by the hope that he would not put his design in execution. Their fears were at least in some measure lulled, by his having consented so easily to delay his mar-

riage, and when an event is delayed, there is always room to hope that it may never take place.

The account which Mrs. Almorne gave Sir John of Sir Esmond's marriage, and of his correspondence with Valmonsor, contributed still more to restore his tranquillity. He was extremely fond of his nephew, and highly esteemed him, and was now not only relieved from the uneasiness he had suffered about him, but felt the greatest satisfaction in knowing that his marriage, an event to which he had often looked forward with much anxiety, was happily accomplished.

To Constantia alone, Mrs. Almorne communicated Matilda's story, but she spoke of her and her mother to Sir John and Lady Orville, in such high terms, as made them perfectly happy in the choice Sir Esmond had made.

A few weeks before, Lady Orville would have been a little mortified in Matilda's having no connexions in the fashionable world; but

intrinsic worth she now felt a blessing, which would have made her think Sir Esmond fortunate in his wife, although she had been as inferior to him in station, as she was in fortune.

No inquiries were made, which Mrs. Almorne found any difficulty in answering agreeably. Her esteem was a certain passport to the favour of Sir John and Lady Ornaville, and they had no desire to know more than she informed them of.

In the wishes of Sir Esmond to conceal his marriage till he could bring Lady Anson to Ornaville, they readily concurred, but earnestly wished that the time for it might soon arrive.

Sir John hoped the occupation Mrs. Arnvale and her daughter must necessarily give to Lady Ornaville, would suspend her melancholy reflections, while the company of his old friend and his nephew would be a most valuable acquisition to himself.

From Valmonsor's letter to Sir Esmond, Sir

John augered every thing he wished. He calculated the time which must elapse before the necessary letters could pass between them, and imagined that nothing more was wanting to accomplish his wishes. He requested Mrs. Almorne to endeavour to impress Constantia with the same views, and let him again have the happiness of seeing her face adorned with smiles.

Constantia had so often declared that she would never give Valmonsor any farther encouragement, though it were in her power, but would leave him entirely to the dictates of his own feeling and judgment, that Mrs. Almorne did not think it proper to inform her of the whole of her conversation with Sir Esmond; but she told her his opinion of Valmonsor's conduct, of the letter he had received from him, and of the consequences which might naturally be expected to result from it.

Sir Esmond's favourable opinion of Valmonsor, had now as formerly much power over the mind of Constantia, and she was likewise pleased with the prospect of hearing

of him occasionally by means of Sir Esmond; but higher her expectations did not rise, for she was too much dispirited and anxious, to build hope on what appeared to her slight foundations.

Of Sir Esmond's story, Mrs. Almorne concealed no part from her. It was Matilda's anxious wish, that Miss Ornvile should be made fully acquainted with her history, that she might be under no mistake respecting the woman, who aspired to the happiness of calling her sister; and this she had so earnestly desired, that Sir Esmond requested Mrs. Almorne to carry his narrative to Miss Ornvile.

It was highly suited to interest the feelings of Constantia, who read it again and again, till every part of it was deeply impressed on her memory.

The distresses of Mrs. Arnvale powerfully affected her, and she was particularly struck with the view of her at Mrs. Sorell's, which she contrasted with the scenes of comfort,

affluence, and security, she had herself always enjoyed;—but the situation of Matilda, still more than the sufferings of Mrs. Arnvale, taught Constantia how to appreciate the advantages of her own lot; while the love of virtue which Matilda had evinced, excited the highest admiration.

It did yet more; it forcibly impressed her mind with the importance, from the effect of example, of her own conduct in a way of which she had hitherto been unconscious. She had imagined that she was of no consequence in the creation beyond the little circle of friends by whom she was surrounded;—she now found, that no limits could be fixed to the influence of even a very private individual: a single impression given of her in a casual manner, had guided the conduct of a person she had never seen; the same impression might have operated, although oceans had rolled between them; and thus, the influence of an individual may extend from one to another, to the extremities of the earth.

CHAPTER VII.

CONSTANTIA's anxiety about Frederic made her take the first opportunity of speaking of him to Mrs. Almorne. She informed her of the conversation she had had with him, and earnestly desired to know if she had received any farther intelligence of Miss Alderton from Mr. Hanway?

Mrs. Almorne said that he had only confirmed the impressions he had formerly given of her, but she expected to receive from him in a day or two a letter on the subject, when she would speak of it to her fully.

As Mrs. Almorne seemed desirous to avoid the conversation, Constantia forbore to press it, though from her appearance she apprehended fresh cause of disquietude; and a few

days after on the arrival of a letter from Mr. Hanway, Mrs. Almorne acknowledged that a most unexpected and distressing event had occurred respecting Mrs. Ornvile, which she had wished to avoid mentioning till she knew what effect it would have on Frederic.

“ Mr. Hanway’s letter,” continued Mrs. Almorne, “ has given me full information, but before you peruse it, it is necessary to mention some particulars with which you are unacquainted.

When Mrs. Ornvile left England, it was determined that the time of her return should depend on the state of her grandfather’s health, but she hoped it would not be later than September. On the first idea of annulling his marriage, Frederic thought it necessary to secure her remaining at Altona, till his measures were decided; and fearing she might return without giving him notice of her intention in time to prevent it, he wrote to her before he consulted me, to desire that she would not think of leaving Altona, without giving him intimation of her design some time

before. He assigned no cause for this, but said he would explain it in a future letter.

This was not enough to satisfy the anxious temper of his wife, who surprised and alarmed at his request, imagined it arose from pecuniary embarrassments, which from kind motives he wished to have settled before her return.

Solicitous however, to be relieved from a state of suspense, she wrote privately to young Alderton, to desire he would inform her if the house had suffered any loss that would endanger its stability, and acknowledged the cause of her inquiry.

Alderton showed her letter to his mother; to whom it immediately suggested a means of advancing the interest of her daughter. She probably feared, that either the amiableness of Frederic's character, or the influence of his friends would prevent his adhering to his design of dissolving his marriage; and imagined, from what she had heard of the irritable and jealous temper of his wife, that the informing

her of his intention, would lead her to show a resentment, which would render him more impatient of his fetters, or at least convince him, that all hope of future comfort with her must be at an end.

But whatever may have been precisely her views, she represented to her son, that since Mr. Ornvillè was determined to annul his marriage, it would save him a great deal of pain, and be for the interest of every person concerned, if his wife could receive a hint of his intention from some other person than himself; and with much difficulty she at length prevailed upon Alderton to answer Mrs. Ornvillè's letter to the following effect.

That he had no reason to believe pecuniary affairs had any share in prompting the request Mr. Ornvillè had made, which he rather imagined owing to a cause that he could not think of informing her of, without the utmost reluctance; but as she anxiously wished to be relieved from a state of suspense, and as it might be better she should be a little prepared for an event, which probably

awaited her, he would venture to tell her that Mr. Ornvile had lately entertained thoughts of annulling his marriage. That he had been led to think of it, from their union having little promoted the happiness of either, and likewise, perhaps, from his having some other connexion in view. The recent death of Mr. Rook, the clergyman, who had married them, he mentioned as an event, that would facilitate his design; at the same time that he expressed himself very doubtful if Mr. Ornvile had yet formed any decisive resolution upon the subject. He concluded by earnestly intreating she would not let her husband know that she was acquainted with his design, but inquire of himself his motives for retarding their meeting, which would probably lead to a full explanation of his intentions.

These were the heads of his letter, which was dictated by his mother with considerable address; but when she fancied it would be of advantage to her daughter, she was extremely mistaken in the character of Mrs. Ornvile. Whatever anxiety or impatience of temper she might discover in the presence of her hus-

band, when she only feared that he did not feel for her all the affection she wished ; she was little formed to struggle against the conviction of his total indifference : her gentle nature bent beneath the stroke, and but for the sake of her children, she would have yielded to it unresistingly.

The manner in which it affected her, Mr. Hanway has been informed of by his old friend Mr. Armiger, who made him a visit last year, and upon Mrs. Ornville's leaving England, accompanied her to Altona. He writes to him, that Alderton's letter was delivered to her by a servant when she was alone, and whether she read to the conclusion of it is not known ; but some time after her aunt went into the room, and found her lying insensible on the floor, with the letter open beside her.

With much difficulty she was recalled to life, but it was apparently to a state of half existence ; she breathed, but her faculties seemed suspended, except at moments when the sorrow of her aunt was particularly affecting. She then pressed her hand, but did not

peak, and rejected every refreshment that was offered.

In this state she continued two days, before her aunt sent for Mr. Armiger to consult him what should be done for her.

He asked if she had seen her children since the receipt of Alderton's letter?

Mrs. Benezet said, that she had prevented their coming near her, lest the sight of them might affect her too much.

Mr. Armiger thought they would rather awaken her to some concern for herself, and they were accordingly brought to her bedside, where, without being desired, they laid themselves down, and threw their arms about her neck.

The moment she became sensible they were with her, she started up in a transport of grief, and clasping them in her arms gave way to the most affecting effusions of tenderness and sorrow.

Armiger entreated that she would for their sakes, show some regard to herself, and by degrees he moderated the violence of her affliction.

He likewise succeeded in prevailing upon her to take a slight repast, after which Mrs. Benezet seized a moment of apparent calmness, to represent to her that Alderton might be mistaken in the information he had given her. But she could receive no consolation from the suggestion. She said it was impossible that he could have ventured to write in the manner he had done, if he had not been perfectly certain of what he advanced; that at most he could only be mistaken in a slight degree, and though she were assured that she had no rival to dread, still the idea that Mr. Orville could for a *moment*, deliberately wish their separation, was death to her.

The next day she requested to have pen and ink, and made an attempt to write, but at the first word she was so much affected that she could not proceed. An hour after she made another effort with no better success,

and after many reiterated attempts was at length obliged to abandon her design.

The following day she again expressed a desire to take up the pen, which her aunt wished to dissuade her from, but she said, she hoped she should now be able, as it was only to a friend she intended to write.

Writing materials were then brought to her, and, after many interruptions, she finished a letter addressed to me, which she begged Mr. Armiger would send inclosed in one from himself to Mr. Hanway.

He promised to do so, and with Mrs. Benezet's approbation, he sent him also a copy of Alderton's letter to Mrs. Orville. His own letter was dated a week after the arrival of Alderton's, yet there was then no change in her for the better. She hardly ever slept or took any food, though at the request of her friends, she rose every morning, and had her clothes put on. As soon as she was dressed, she made a visit to her grandfather, who was not able to leave his apartment, and

during the rest of the day, she lay upon a sofa apparently in a state of insensibility, with her face constantly covered, except when her children were present. At their approach she awakened from her lethargic state, and fell into such distracting fits of sorrow, as obliged her aunt to keep them separate from her as much as possible, both for her sake and theirs, for they were always much distressed, and sometimes terrified at her affliction.

Mr. Armiger concludes his letter by saying she had become so extremely weak, that he feared she could not long sustain life under such sufferings.

When Hanway received Armiger's letter, he showed it immediately to Alderton, with the copy of his own, which had produced such melancholy effects. Alderton, penetrated with grief, and anxious to justify himself to Hanway, acknowledged, that he had been compelled by his mother to write it, and related the conversation she had had with him to effect her purpose.

It was by this means Mr. Hanway discovered the conduct of Mrs. Alderton, of which he informed me, when he brought me the packet from Armiger. We both agreed, that the letters should immediately be shown to Frederic, but that he should otherwise be left to the dictates of his own feelings, being convinced they would have all the effect we could wish, and that our interference would be equally indelicate and superfluous.

This was the occasion of his being hurried to town, which I quitted before his arrival without hesitation, believing my presence could do no good, and might aggravate his unhappiness.

Before I parted with Mrs. Orville's letter, I took a copy of it for you, which you may now read.

On saying this, Mrs. Almorne took a letter from her pocket book, and gave it to Constantia.

“TO MRS. ALMORNE.

“To you, my dear Madam, as the friend, the maternal friend of my husband, I address myself on the subject of his intended dissolution of our marriage; a design with which you are probably not unacquainted.

“Every attempt I have made to speak of it to himself has overpowered me. I can find no language adequate to the expression of my feelings, and if I could,—can have no hope it would influence him.

“You, I know, will feel for him with parental tenderness, while from your virtues and impartial judgment, I may expect all the consideration I can deserve.

“For myself, indeed, I have nothing to ask,—nothing to hope. Deprived of his affection, his presence could yield me no joy; and all situations are alike indifferent to me. —The ignominy of being abandoned by so amiable a man; the being reduced from an enviable and distinguished situation to a forlorn and degraded one; and the being left while yet young, unprotected by the man, to

whom I trusted as the guide of my future years,—are misfortunes, which are all absorbed in the loss of his affection: in having once possessed, and now lost it, I have experienced, as far as I can feel any thing which affects myself only, the extremes of happiness and misery!

“ Mr. Orville has, I am sensible, cause to be displeased with me. Disappointed in the affection I expected from him, my agonized heart betrayed its feelings in unavailing sorrow and complaint. Could I have preserved his tenderness, that affection which became his torment, might have been his happiness.

“ Often since we parted, I would have given worlds for the renewal of those moments in which I was so discontented!—With what tremulous anxiety have I waited for the hour in which I should again see his children in his arms! when taught by the misery of separation, I should no longer be jealous of the time he devoted to them, but endeavour by every means in my power to render his home peaceful and happy. How little I foresaw, that those moments were never to return!—how bitter my contrition!

“ But I must stop these reflections, which rend my heart with indescribable anguish, and can now be of no avail. Never shall I see him more,—never again must he be troubled with my presence ;—but though on my own account, I would not oppose what he thinks necessary to his comfort, yet for the sake of his children, I cannot consent to resign him entirely. They have done nothing to offend him, and he has himself taught them to feel the most rapturous sensations at the sound of his name. Let him then feel pity for them, and not condemn them to suffer for the errors of their mother.

“ For their sakes, I implore him to consider well the consequences of the act he meditates. Let him wait but a little while, till I shall be no more, and contented with separation from me, prevent the fate of his beloved children, from being stamped by the misfortunes of their mother.

“ Although they are the only comfort I can ever know, I will relinquish them to him, if I do not also resign them to a step-mother. Can it be expected I should do this ?—— But you have been a mother, my dear Madam,

and your own heart will tell you the feelings of mine.

“LYDIA ORNVILLE.”

Constantia wept long over this letter, and Mrs. Almorne was too much affected by it, to give any interruption to her sorrow.

Anxiety to know the effect of Mr. Armiger's letter on Frederic, made Constantia at length break silence, and inquire of Mrs. Almorne, what intelligence she had received from Mr. Hanway?

Mrs. Almorne answered by giving her the following letter.

“TO MRS. ALMORNE.

“My dear Madam,

“Upon Ornvill's arrival in town, he came, as I had requested, directly to me. We met with our usual kindness, but few words had

passed before he observed, that my appearance was uncommonly grave. I acknowledged it proceeded from anxiety about him, as I had received unpleasant intelligence from Altona.

“ ‘The boys!’ cried he, turning pale, ‘have met with some misfortune!’

“ ‘No,’ I replied, ‘they are well, but their mother is ill.’

“ I then informed him of the letter she had written to Alderton, and gave him his answer.

“ He read it with great indignation, throwing out passionate invectives against the young man, whom I begged him not to be displeased with, as he was but a tool in the hands of his mother, of whose conversation with him, I gave him an account.

“ He viewed her conduct as I wished, and before I had ended my recital, anxiously interrupted me to ask, how I knew that his wife was ill? I replied by putting Armiger’s letter into his hands.

“ At the first page his agitation became great, and before he had finished the letter, he said he would go to her,—he would instantly go to Altona.

“ He appeared so miserable, that I thought it almost cruel to give him Mrs. Orville’s letter to you, yet it could not be withheld. He took it with a trembling hand, and hurried out of the room.

“ In half an hour he returned, with an appearance more wretched than I can describe. He told me he was going as quickly as possible to Altona, and begged I would assist him in making the necessary arrangements, as he hardly knew what he did.

“ I instantly complied; left him as little to do as possible, and it was not long before he was ready to depart; but I could not see him go alone, and I accompanied him the first day of his journey.

“ Before we parted, he begged I would inform Mrs. Alderton of what had happened, and tell her that all thoughts of separation from his wife were for ever at an end; ‘ but,’ added he, ‘ let not your just indignation at Mrs. Alderton extend to her daughter;—she is sufficiently unfortunate in her mother and me.’

“ I gave him the note you had written to Mrs. Orville, and one to her from myself to

be given before their meeting. The object of it was to prepare her to see him without fear, and to save him painful explanations. I told her, that although invidious people had been at pains to separate them, their arts had failed from the tenderness and esteem her husband had for her; and could she have seen the misery he suffered on the slightest intimation of her distress, she would be convinced that their re-union, and the restoration of her peace, were indispensable to his.

“I expressed this in few words, when I had no time for reflection, but I hope it will have some effect in rendering their meeting easier. I did not show him my letter, but told him the purport of it, which, he said, afforded him great relief.

“He has no heart for the design he planned, and I cannot help indulging the most flattering hopes of a happy termination to his distresses. When his passion for Miss Alderton is a little counteracted by other affections, his discovery of her character, which will then be easily effected, will entirely destroy it; while the remembrance of his wife’s sufferings, her improved conduct, and his af-

fection for his children, will all conspire to attach him to her truly, and complete the happiness of both.

“ I have desired Armiger to give me minute accounts of him and his family, and the moment I receive any, they shall be transmitted to you.

“ I arrived in town only a few hours ago, and have not yet seen Mrs. Alderton, whose disappointment will deservedly be great, as I shall not fail to inform her, that she took the most effectual method she could have devised, to frustrate her hopes.

“ I ever am, my dear Madam,

“ Most faithfully yours.

London Nov. 18th. “ EDWARD HANWAY.”

This letter afforded great consolation to Mrs. Almorne and Constantia, and the former was inclined to indulge in all the hopes of

Mr. Hanway; but the expectations of the latter were less sanguine. She knew better than Mrs. Almorne, the character of Lydia, and feared that she would never recover entirely the shock she had received.

Mrs. Almorne was at pains to inspire her with better hopes, and Constantia unwilling to anticipate misfortune, endeavoured to entertain more favourable expectations.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was necessary to inform Sir John and Lady Orville of Frederic's departure for Altona, but it was easy to do so without exciting much anxiety about him, or apprehension for his wife.

A melancholy calm now succeeded the painful sensations, which had lately agitated the family. The cheerfulness that had so long marked their countenances, was gone, but a species of tranquillity was restored, and the ordinary routine of occupations suffered little interruption.

Sir John was the least unhappy of the family. The distress his eldest son's conduct had occasioned, was gradually yielding to the indifference his character had long

been inspiring; while the consolation he had received from the society of Frederic, the being so happily relieved from his fears for his nephew, and encouraged in his hopes of a speedy end to his anxieties about Constantia, all concurred to counteract the effect, which the first discovery of his son's intended marriage had upon him.

Lady Ornaville's spirits continued much below their natural tone, but she was not uniformly sad, as she indulged the hope that Hastings would, on further consideration, relinquish his design; or at least, that he would consent to conceal his marriage, and continue his intercourse with his family as formerly.

Mrs. Almorne resided constantly at Ornaville Abbey, and her society was the great solace and support of the family. As she lived only for others, she generally took the tone of the company she was in, but with the Ornaville family especially, her feelings always vibrated in exact unison, and in her friend-

ship they found a never failing source of consolation.

Constantia endeavoured to appear the most cheerful, but was really the most unhappy inhabitant of the Abbey. To unceasing anxiety about Valmonsor, was now joined extreme sorrow for Frederic and Lydia, with unremitting concern about her father, mother, and Louisa.

Since the visit of her eldest brother, she had never been at Oak Hill, and Louisa had only been once at Ornvile, having been confined at home by a visit from Captain Elford. He had come to Oak Hill on his way to a gentleman's seat near Canterbury, and intended to remain only a day or two, but had been detained above a fortnight by an attack of rheumatism.

During his stay, Sir John and Frederic had called frequently at Oak Hill, and from the observations of the latter, Constantia feared that Louisa was become more unhappy

than ever. She was extremely anxious to see her, and the arrival of Sir Thomas and Lady Vyner to pass some days at the Abbey, affording her a favourable opportunity for leaving her father and mother, she was going the morning after their arrival, to set out for Oak Hill, when she was prevented by the entrance of Miss Hargrave and Louisa.

They were welcomed with the utmost cordiality by Lady Ornaville, who made many kind inquiries about Captain Elford, and expressed much regret for his illness, both on his account and theirs.

Miss Hargrave said that it had been very unlucky, but it was now over, and they were happy to find themselves again at liberty to revisit Ornaville, from which they had greatly lamented their long absence.

“But why, my dear,” said Lady Ornaville, “have we not the pleasure of seeing Harriet along with you?”

“ Harriet,” replied Miss Hargrave, “ complained of a head-ach this morning, which made it better for her to remain at home.”

“ She has been so much accustomed to take exercise,” returned Lady Ornvile, “ that her late confinement must have been hurtful to her. Indeed, I was afraid that you might all suffer from Captain Elford’s illness, if it continued long, and it must have vexed him extremely to occasion you such trouble and anxiety.”

“ But how fortunate it was for him and Mrs. Elford,” said Lady Vyner, “ that he was taken ill at Oak Hill, instead of an Inn; or even the friend’s house he was going to? What a blessing it is in such a case, to have sisters on whose care and tenderness we may rely! It has been a lamentation of mine these thirty years, that Sir Thomas and I never had a brother or sister.”

“ Perhaps, Madam,” said Louisa, “ it has exempted you from a great deal of trouble; brothers and sisters are not always blessings.”

“ They are not,” replied Lady Vyner ;
“ but when relations are amiable, there are
no friendships so agreeable.”

“ I thought,” rejoined Louisa, “ that none
could surpass those which have been known
to subsist between persons wholly unconnected
by the ties of blood.”

“ It may be so,” said Lady Orville, “ yet
we always feel as if we had a better right to
the friendship of relations, and could place
more dependence upon them.”

“ And so we can,” said Lady Vyner ;
“ for we daily see people do a great deal
more for their relations, even when they have
no affection for them, than they would do
for any other persons.”

“ But,” observed Miss Hargrave, “ we see
them also suffer much more from them,
than they could do by others. It is cer-
tainly an advantage attending the friendships
we form with others, that we can easily

break them off, if we find ourselves disappointed in their characters."

"That is an advantage, my dear Prudence," cried Lady Ornaville, "which I am surprised should occur to you, who are so happy in your connexions."

"It is not indeed," said Lady Vyner, "a sentiment which I should ever have expected to hear from *Miss Hargrave*!"

"I fear, Madam," said Mrs. Almorne, seeing Miss Hargrave disconcerted, "that it is an opinion which she may very readily form, from what she has had an opportunity of observing. I will venture to say, that her residence as a single person in various families, has given her more knowledge of domestic situations, than you or Lady Ornaville have acquired in a much longer life. You have never suffered from your own relations, and your situations have been very unfavourable to the discovery of other people's domestic grievances."

“ I have certainly,” replied Lady Vyner, “ known so little of the distresses arising from relations as a general misfortune, that I should think extremely ill of the heart that did not seek to cherish,

“ Relations dear, and all the charities

“ Of Father, Son, and Brother.—”

“ I am so much convinced,” said Lady Orville, “ of the importance of cherishing kindness for relations, that I have been at the utmost pains to inculcate on my children respect for the ties of consanguinity ; I am always telling them how much they should regard each other on that account.”

“ There can be no doubt,” observed Mrs. Almorne, “ that the ties of blood give a very strong claim to affection and consideration ; but how far ought they to influence us independent of the character of individuals ? The being accustomed to regard persons merely on account of consanguinity, may insensibly lead young people to lose their veneration for virtue, and dislike of vice : the faults of those we love, imperceptibly corrupt us.”

“That is a misfortune much to be regretted,” rejoined Lady Ornvile; “but it cannot exempt us from doing our duty. However unfortunate we may be in relatives, there is still a peculiar consideration due to them, which should be deeply implanted in every mind.”

“That is the universal sense of mankind,” said Lady Vyner, “and I never knew a good man who was not a kind relation, or who would not have been shocked at the thought of being a bad one.”

“Would not a good man,” asked Mrs. Almerne, “be shocked at the thought of being bad in any way? Does kindness to relations arise from goodness, or have the ties of blood the power of producing it in the bad man, as well as in the good?”

“Not equally,” replied Lady Vyner, “but they certainly have the power of influencing even bad men in a way which has the happiest effects on society. Do we not

see many people who have no feeling or generosity in their disposition, that yet study the interest of their relations? And what would become of many persons, if it were not for their relatives? Who would befriend them?"

"It might perhaps," said Louisa, "be better for many, if they were not befriended by relations; they presume on the support of connexions to indulge their vices in a manner which they would not otherwise dare to do."

"We must not," replied Lady Vyner, "argue against any thing from the abuse of it: There are many bad sons and daughters in the world, but who would therefore say that he would not be a parent?"

"At least," said Mrs. Almorne, with a smile, "if we should one day say, who would be a parent? we should the next, like the father in the comedy, exclaim, 'who would not be a parent!'"

“That will be exactly the way with my Nieces,” cried Lady Ornaville; “if the distresses of a friend should give them a gloomy view of the ties of blood to-day, reflections on their own happiness will alter their opinion to-morrow. There cannot be any where more domestic harmony than at Oak Hill; nobody will ever see a wry look, or hear a loud word there.”

“I have always,” said Lady Vyner, “quoted the Miss Hargraves as a rare instance of domestic felicity. Where do you see ladies without a care, except themselves? They have nothing to do but to make themselves happy.”

“I hope,” said Constantia, anxious to interrupt the conversation, “they intend to show they can be happy here, as well as at Oak Hill; let us have the pleasure of knowing, ladies, that you intend us a visitation after your long absence?”

“We came,” replied Miss Hargrave,

“ with the intention of remaining till to-morrow.”

“ Indeed,” said Lady Ornvile, “ we shall not part with you so soon; and when Harriet is better, I hope she will follow you.”

CHAPTER IX.

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IN the evening, cards having engaged all the company except Louisa and Constantia, they withdrew to have some conversation in private.

“What is the matter with you, Louisa?” said Constantia, as soon as they were alone; “I never saw you so dejected; have you any new cause of grief?”

“New occurrences aggravate my distresses,” replied Louisa; “but they all spring from the same source.”

“What are these occurrences? The presence of Elford must have given you pain; but in the absence of his wife, I hoped it would not be so afflicting as formerly.”

Tears filled the eye of Louisa, but she did not speak.

“Why are you thus silent, my dear Louisa? Will it not be a consolation to you to open your heart to me?”

“I am too unhappy, my dear Constantia, to receive consolation even from you, and for your sake, I ought to conceal my sorrows.”

“For my sake conceal them! Would you then deny me the consolation of sympathising in your misfortunes, and leave me a prey to fear? Do not, I beseech you, indulge so unkind a thought.”

“I will tell you then,” said Louisa, after a pause;—“yet I know not how;—though I think I should, for I believe Mrs. Almorne’s advice may be of service to me, and I can ask it only through you.”

“Hesitate not then a moment to speak freely; you alarm me strangely.”

“ It is Elford’s visit which has occasioned this distress. He came, he said, to inquire how Harriet was after her illness, and would remain only a day or two, as he was engaged to spend the ensuing week with his friend Mitford, after which he was obliged to be at Plymouth. This account, which was confirmed by a letter he brought from Mrs. Elford, made me hope, that his visit, though extremely disagreeable, would otherwise be of little consequence.

The day he arrived, he complained of having got rheumatic pains by lying in damp linen; the next day he was worse, and the third he was too ill to come down stairs. He was able, however, to sit in his dressing-room, where we attended him. Harriet paid him the greatest attention, and I was much with him, more as a check upon his behaviour to her, than from any other motive.

The second day of his confinement, I began to suspect that his illness was feigned, which alarmed me so much, that I proposed to Prudence to decline receiving any visitors till after his departure, that either she or I might be constantly with him and Harriet; but she

thought it would appear ridiculous to refuse seeing morning visitors on account of an invalid, who was well enough to play at chess. This he did very frequently with Harriet, which afforded her a pretext for being more with him than we.

Before he was a week in the house, several circumstances in their behaviour gave us so much uneasiness, as induced me to write her a letter, in which I remonstrated in the strongest terms on the impropriety of her conduct. I told her that she ought never to have passed an hour in his presence after the discovery of his passion for her, which she must have seen long before she left his house in summer; that she now stood on the brink of a precipice, from which if she did not immediately retreat, irreparable calamity to herself and her friends must be the consequence; and that unless we should instantly see a complete change on her behaviour, neither Prudence nor I would any longer regard her as a sister.

To this letter she made no reply, but it appeared to make some alteration in her conduct. It was however a change, that seemed

to aim at disguise more than reformation ; it had therefore little effect in quieting our apprehensions, and a few days after——”

The agitation of Louisa, did not suffer her to proceed, and it was some minutes before she could add, “an accident discovered to us, that her ruin was irretrievable.”

Again Louisa stopt, and Constantia lifted up her hands with an expression of horror, but could not speak.

“The anguish of that moment,” resumed Louisa, after some time, “I shall never forget. To describe the mingled sensations of misery and despair that seized me, is impossible. I was but just able to retire to my own apartment, where I lay for some time insensible.

Although Prudence was excessively shocked, she did not sink so much as I did, and unfortunately, we differed as to the conduct we ought to pursue. I was for insisting upon his immediate departure, and for renouncing all friendship with her in private, till we

should consider whether we ought not to separate from her entirely.

Prudence opposed my opinion strongly. She said, that the obliging him to leave the house, when he was believed to be very ill, would be proclaiming to all our acquaintance such extraordinary displeasure, as might lead to a discovery of the cause;—that the having even any quarrel with him in private, would separate us for ever from Mrs. Elford, without reforming him, or retrieving the innocence of Harriet; that it was therefore proper we should appear blind, unless we could separate from her completely, as it would be infinitely more painful to live with her in any way, after avowing our knowledge of her guilt, than to continue with her on civil terms, while she supposed us ignorant;—and that in fine, the only right conduct we could pursue was to conceal our misfortune by every means in our power; for although we had little reason to regard Harriet, we ought not to be indifferent about ourselves, as we must be involved in her disgrace, and that we ought also to consider the interest of Mrs. Elford and her family, whose

peace would be for ever destroyed by the discovery of Elford's profligacy.

This last argument was irresistible, and as I believed he was under the necessity of being at Plymouth in a few days, I consented to resume, as well as I could, my ordinary style of behaviour.

Fancy me now, Constantia, placed in his apartment, not as before to prevent guilt, but to protect it. I was no longer, indeed, a watchful observer of his conduct, for I sat at work in a window, where I could not see him, and could scarcely be seen by him; but both Prudence and I passed as much time in his room as was sufficient to prevent Harriet's attention to him from appearing remarkable to the servants.

He pretended now to be recovering, and a week after, which was some days later than we expected, he departed."

Louisa now ceased speaking, but Constantia remained silent.

"I have silenced you, Constantia," said Louisa, after a long pause.

“ I am inexpresibly shocked,” she replied, “ and the confusion of my mind is so great, that I know not what to say or think.”

“ It is no wonder ; I knew the information you desired, would hurt you extremely.”

“ The point,” said Constantia, “ to which my thoughts most anxiously turn, is the deliverance of you ;—you must not remain with Harriet.”

“ I think so, yet know not how to act, and it is on this account, I wish for the advice of Mrs. Almoré. Prudence and I still disagree about the conduct we should adopt. She thinks we should continue to live with Harriet apparently in the usual way, but in private, treat her with reserve, though without letting her suspect that we are aware of the extent of her crime. She proposes that we should write her a letter, expressive of the strongest disapprobation of her various offences, but more particularly of her behaviour to Elford ; and declaring, that if ever she receives a visit from him at Oak Hill, or meets him in any

other place, we shall instantly renounce all connexion with her.

This plan does not satisfy me. If we only threaten to renounce her, I fear it may have no effect on her conduct, and I can have no dependence either on his prudence or hers in guarding against detection. He is of too unfeeling a disposition, to be deterred from any pursuit in which he is passionately engaged, by regard to the peace of others, and though she will be more afraid of discovery, she may be too much hurried away by passion, to be always on her guard. If sheltered by us she may be inconsiderate, but were we separated, she would be convinced her place in society rested entirely on the correctness of her own behaviour, and would feel the necessity of circumspection in a manner, that might oblige him to give her up. It is plain that nothing is to be hoped from our remonstrances, or her regard to morality, and the reformation of her conduct is therefore only to be expected from motives of self-interest.

I feel besides, extreme repugnance to the appearing to live in intimate friendship with a person of whom I have so bad an opinion;

while such miserable hypocrisy in public, would hardly be more painful, than the associating with her in private, even in the most reserved manner."

"In any way it would be too painful."

"My wish therefore is, that we should either separate from her directly, without letting our friends know the cause, or be guided by the opinion of those, on whose judgment we can rely ; but Prudence is totally averse to separation, from fear of the odium which might attach itself to us from it, and she is no less reluctant to any reference to others, lest they should oppose her wishes. She likewise thinks that separation might facilitate, rather than prevent Elford's interviews with Harriet, and dreads the discovery of their guilt as the greatest misfortune which can befall us."

"Has she no fear of its being already known to your servants?"

"None ; for by her indefatigable cares there

was no danger of it. Her own maid, who is by far the most sagacious and observing servant in the house, she immediately gave leave to make a visit to her friends, and took various precautions to prevent suspicions arising among the rest. I could not regret the concealment, yet felt extremely miserable in thus supporting their iniquity, but all Prudence's feelings were absorbed in the terror of public disgrace."

"How has Harriet behaved since Elford's departure?"

"She has been grave, but otherwise as usual."

"She must be extremely miserable."

"Unhappy she must be, yet, perhaps, less so than you imagine; when her passions speak, she listens only to them."

"In this instance, her passions will be her punishment, for if she does not feel remorse, she must at least suffer pain from the impossibility of marrying the man she loves."

“ For a while she will, but not long. Her partiality for Elford is very different from the love you are acquainted with. It will not survive separation, or any kind of disappointment, and in his absence she will soon resort to a new object, for it is the employment of her passions that she requires. Of that attachment of the heart which is its own reward; which new objects cannot alter, or absence diminish; which bids defiance to suffering, and is wholly remote from selfishness, she has not an idea.

But though insensible to love, she is not incapable of affection; and had she married, early in life, a man that she liked, and had had a family, she might not now have appeared, even in our eyes, an unamiable woman. If she had found employment at home to engage her mind, and suppress her restless passions, she would not have wandered in pursuit of admiration, into those dangerous paths, through which she has been hurried along like an impetuous torrent disdaining all opposition. Nature gave her strong passions, but education did not give her a compass to steer them by, and she had not natural strength of mind to

discover, or propensities sufficiently amiable to pursue unguided, the proper course. ‘She is a Pipe for Fortune’s finger to sound what stop she pleases.’ ”

“ You surprise me extremely, for to me she does not appear variable.”

“ You have never seen her in different situations, or you would perceive, that she is steady only in her love of admiration, and in the conduct and sentiments to which it has given rise. No sooner did Captain Elford become agreeable to her, than she was influenced by his opinions, and I am persuaded that he gained her nearly as much by misleading her judgment, as by interesting her feelings.”

“ This is extraordinary, as she always gives her sentiments with a clearness and celerity which makes it impossible to suspect, that they are not the offspring of natural character and force of mind.”

“ It is true, yet they are seldom original;

but she is enabled to display them easily, by possessing elocution, and by having got her lesson, on almost every subject, from books or persons she respects. She is a singular woman, for notwithstanding her errors, she is good tempered and humane, and when her passions are not particularly interested, no evil trait appears.

It may be said in excuse for her failings, that she has always been most unfortunate in her domestic situation. The last four years we were in Cornwall, my mother's indifferent health, and melancholy tone of mind, kept us in the most recluse state. Prudence often went from home, and was more a companion to my mother than we; we had no companion except each other; no amusements, no books, or employment of any kind, but the most ordinary female occupations, and we both languished for such, as might give some exercise to the understanding.

To Harriet our life was insupportably dull; and when she came into Kent near four years ago, she was like a bird escaped from its cage, eager to enjoy liberty; but she might never have strayed improperly, had she not

found home disagreeable. The necessity of living with Prudence, has been the ruin of Harriet. To a woman of her quick parts and lively temper, Prudence was unfortunately, a most tiresome, teasing, discordant companion; and accordingly, Harriet flew from her wherever she could find more agreeable society, and yielded to her passion for admiration, without suspicion of its dangerous consequences, till the adulation she met with became too intoxicating, and the habit of indulgence too powerful for control. A few years ago, she might, perhaps, have been as much shocked at the supposition of the guilt she has incurred, as you.

“Never let man be bold enough to say,

“Thus, and no farther shall my passions stray;

“The first crime past, compels us on to more,

“And guilt proves fate, that was but choice before.”

“Amidst all your misery, Louisa, you have one consolation, she cannot now marry Tresilian.”

“I dare not indulge the hope, and my apprehension of the contrary increases my unhappiness.”

“ Can she be so base ? ”

“ What may not be feared from a woman who has violated so many duties ? ”

“ If you cannot trust to her acting right, you may at least put it out of her power to injure him ; he should be informed of her conduct. ”

“ By what means ? Who would undertake the task, or whom would he believe ? ”

“ A friend he esteemed. ”

“ Perhaps not ; for if he did not suspect them of wilful injustice, he might of prejudice or mistake. Nor could I condemn him for distrusting injurious reports of characters far less established than Harriet's. How many falsehoods are propagated ? How many mistakes even prove fatal ? There can be nothing more necessary to the peace of society, than slow and difficult belief in defamation. Have not you experienced the danger of giving easy credit to reports which cannot be termed

false? Harriet said nothing of you to Valmonsor which many of your acquaintance might not have said."

"How like a child you make me appear, Louisa?"

"You are no child, Constantia; you are greatly my superior wherever peculiar circumstances have not led me to deeper reflection."

"You always generously endeavour to raise me above yourself, at the moment I sink with conscious inferiority."

"I am only just, my dear Constantia. In similar circumstances you would have seen as quickly as myself, how difficult it must be to preserve Tresilian from Harriet. But, however difficult, I wish it could be attempted; much would I suffer to save him from such a wife."

"How has she behaved to him lately?"

"She has not seen him. To my great

surprise, he is not returned from the excursion he went upon in September."

"Perhaps he is growing indifferent ; but, be that as it may, I wish you to consult Mrs. Almorne about him, and every other cause of your anxiety : to her you may safely intrust your sorrows."

"I wish earnestly for her advice, but should be unhappy in communicating my distresses to her myself. If you will be so kind as to do it for me, I am certain I shall derive much benefit from her instructions."

"I shall do it this night, as soon as she retires to her apartment."

CHAPTER X.

CONSTANTIA had no sooner given Mrs. Al-
morne the information Louisa desired, than
she replied, that she had no hesitation in ad-
vising what she ought to do, and hoped the
advice she meant to give would be as agree-
able to Miss Hargrave as to Louisa.

“ I feel extremely,” said Mrs. Al-
morne, “ for the latter, but I sympathize also in the
feelings of the former. Louisa, young, ar-
dent, and glowing with the love of virtue,
thinks nothing more painful or improper than
submission to vice ; Miss Hargrave, with less
warmth of feeling, more knowledge of the
world, and less understanding to support her
against the opinions of others, naturally shrinks
with terror from the disgrace she would suffer
by the discovery of Harriet’s conduct. Were

she and Louisa to be guided merely by regard to their own happiness, they would act in the most opposite manner ; but, fortunately, all personal disagreement may be avoided by their having a superior duty to consider.

They should, in my opinion, act in the way which they think will be most agreeable to Mrs. Elford, whose advice they should endeavour to obtain. From her behaviour on parting with them, I suspect she knows more of her husband's partiality for Harriet, than they are aware of ; and I should hope it may not be difficult for Louisa to request, without giving her new cause of alarm, such an explanation of her conduct as may afford instruction for the regulation of her own. She should at least attempt this before she forms any resolution, for Mrs. Elford is an amiable and sensible woman, whose opinion may safely be trusted, and her near relation to your friend makes her the fittest person to advise her. The happiness of Mrs. Elford and her family may likewise be so very deeply affected by the conduct of her sisters, that it is their duty to consider her interest more than their own.

Tell Louisa this, and that I think it unnecessary to give any farther opinion on the subject. In a case of such importance, it would be wrong to bias the mind of a young person, who has a friend by whose judgment she ought to be guided, and whose sentiments may differ from mine.

As to Tresilian, I think there is no occasion for alarm about him at present. There is something ambiguous in his behaviour to Harriet which a short time may explain, and enable us to consider, to more advantage, what should be done for him. From the time he devotes to her, I have no doubt that he finds some powerful attraction in her company ; but from his having attended her so long without forming any engagement, I suspect that he has either never entertained any design of marriage, or has been discouraged. If, on his return, his conduct gives new cause for apprehension, it will then be proper to devise means for his safety."

CHAPTER XI.



THE advice of Mrs. Almorne gave great satisfaction to Louisa. She wished much to have known her own opinion of the conduct that should be observed to Harriet, but she was perfectly satisfied to be guided by Mrs. Elford's; and, fortunately, had received a letter from her two days before, which afforded an opportunity of consulting her, without danger of exciting suspicion of the immediate cause.

Mrs. Elford had written to inquire if her husband had fixed any time for Harriet's making her a visit, as it was his intention to do so; and entreated, if she entertained any design of coming, that her sisters would prevent it, as it would make her extremely mi-

serable, if she should ever again see her under her roof.

Louisa sat down immediately to answer this letter, and hoped to do it in a manner that would produce the wished-for effect.

She began by acknowledging that Captain Elford had invited Harriet to pass the month of January at his house, but that Prudence and she would certainly prevent it, by declaring, if necessary, that final separation from them would infallibly be the consequence of her complying with his request; a threat which she did not believe would be disregarded.

Separation, however, was a measure she said which she was, at all events, inclined to adopt, as the only means of correcting effectually her errors, and of relieving them from the misery they occasioned. She mentioned the various causes of their displeasure with her, and urged the advantages which might be expected from separation, as far as she could venture to do so, without risk of excit-

ing new causes of anxiety in Mrs. Elford. She likewise stated the objections which Miss Hargrave opposed to her design, and concluded by earnestly requesting her advice, both with regard to their immediate conduct to Harriet, and in the event of her being guilty of errors which might be still more reprehensible.

Louisa did not wish to communicate this letter to Miss Hargrave, fearing it would occasion useless altercation; but, just as it was finished, she came into the room, and asked to whom she was writing?

Louisa frankly acknowledged it was to Mrs. Elford, and gave her the letter to read, without any hint of its being suggested by Mrs. Almorne; knowing that she would be incensed at the discovery of Harriet's conduct to her, while jealousy would make her spurn at any reference to her judgment.

The moment Miss Hargrave had read the letter, she expressed high disapprobation of Louisa for asking Mrs. Elford's advice, without being certain it would be in her power to.

follow it; and declared, that whatever Mrs. Elford might think, she would adhere to her own opinion, and be directed by her own ideas of what was right.

“ You may at least,” said Louisa, “ be glad to know her sentiments, for it will be a satisfaction if they coincide with your own ; and, if they do not, she may possibly employ some arguments to reconcile you to hers.”

“ None she can employ,” replied Miss Hargrave,” will have any weight with me, while I think her a partial judge. I have the greatest regard for Mrs. Elford, who is an excellent woman, and a very kind sister, but resentment towards Harriet may blind her judgment.”

“ There is no occasion for your being entirely governed by her opinion,” returned Louisa, “ but you ought certainly to pay some regard to it.”

“ It is very pretty in you, Miss,” retorted Miss Hargrave, disdainfully, “ to tell me

what I ought to do ! I hope I can discover that without your assistance."

"I mean no offence, Prudence; I only wish to observe, that Mrs. Elford is entitled to our consideration, since she must suffer much more from Harriet than we can do."

"I am of a very different opinion; privately, indeed, she must suffer much more than we, but were Harriet's character known, Mrs. Elford's place in the world would not be half so much affected by it as ours. Every body would feel for a wife and mother suffering such a calamity, while they would, perhaps, only think of us to suspect that we had a little of Harriet's blood in our veins. Mrs. Elford's good character has long been established, but you are young, and neither you nor I have been in situations to show our dispositions, or have any claim to the consideration which the mother of a family is always certain of, when she behaves well. I should be ashamed to show myself in the world, were our misfortune known."

“That uneasiness would not last, since it is unjust. Why should we suffer for the faults of our sister? The world is not so righteous as always to punish people for their own vices, much less for those of their kindred.”

“The world is certainly not over righteous; but some people suffer for slight offences, while others may commit crimes with impunity. Most men, and many married women, may do almost any thing they please, but single women must be careful of their reputation. We are neither so rich, nor so great, Louisa, as to be careless of character. Don't you remember how Miss Welgrove was avoided by some of her acquaintance when her brother's worthlessness became known? We should be as much shunned, if Harriet's conduct were discovered.”

“And, rather than suffer undeserved neglect, you would be the protector of vice?”

“Would you call me the protector of vice, because I do not make a fruitless attempt to

correct it? I am not empowered to punish crimes."

"Neither are you permitted to connive at them."

"Lord! Louisa, have I not told you, a thousand and a thousand times, that I am not to blame for tolerating Harriet's faults? The world obliges me to do it. Did you not observe yesterday, how Lady Vyner persuaded even Mrs. Almorne of the *extraordinary* consideration due to relations?"

"I am far from certain that Mrs. Almorne was of Lady Vyner's opinion, though she dropped the subject; disputation she thinks the bane of conversation, and never carries it farther than appears agreeable."

"But she is so fond of argument, that she would not have dropped it so soon, had she not been convinced that Lady Vyner was right."

"She is fond of discussion, but she finds so

many people rooted in prejudice, or tenacious of opinions, merely because they have adopted them ; and so apt to substitute assertion for argument, that she very rarely indulges in debate. She thinks Lady Vyner a worthy woman, who has a great deal of good household sense, and she would, therefore, be sorry to oppose her, but could so little expect to turn her out of the common track of opinion, that I am persuaded she would not have engaged in the conversation at all, if it had not been to support us."

"If that is your opinion of Lady Vyner, why did you begin and continue the conversation?"

"From curiosity, and had not Mrs. Almorne shown, that she thought it right to put an end to it, I would have tried how far Lady Vyner would think proper to go in supporting worthless relations."

"Your curiosity about peoples' opinions in that particular, may be very soon gratified, by observing their actions. Mr. Reedmore's

conduct is univerfally condemned, and many of his friends have deserted him on account of it ; yet, when his sister was censured for appearing so much with him in public, I heard the good and sensible Miss Harwood, who is so greatly extolled for her understanding and virtue, say, that it was the duty of Miss Reedmore to support her brother.”

“ Such cruel and dishonourable behaviour as Reedmore’s should be discountenanced by every one.”

“ But Miss Harwood thinks just as other people do. How often have you heard Mr. Cotton preach to his children about the great attention they should pay to the interest and happiness of each other through life, without saying a syllable of this attention being in the least regulated by their good behaviour ?”

“ It is amusing to hear Mr. Cotton speak in that style, who was himself a bad son, and a most indifferent brother.”

“ He knows what is right nevertheless.”

“ His conduct is the mere effect of selfishness. He gives himself very little trouble for the benefit of his relations, but he sees it is for the interest of his children to pursue a different course. I hear many persons talk in praise of the good effects which flow from regard to the ties of blood, while their own behaviour, though they are unconscious of it, is a direct refutation of their opinions.”

“ But as long as the generality of people think like Miss Harwood, so must we. I can assure you, that very few good characters forsake their near relations as long as their vices can be concealed, unless, indeed, they quarrel with them, and even then they are not fond of exposing their faults: 'tis the labour of some peoples' whole lives to disguise them. Nay, so jealous are people of their credit in relations, that I have known many persons sacrifice the important interest of a worthy relative, rather than their own vanity should suffer mortification by his appearing in an inferior point of view.”

“ All that is very wrong, for it encourages

the guilty, and renders the innocent miserable."

"I confess, since I have suffered so severely from Harriet's faults, I have not thought it altogether right ; but what does my opinion signify? I hardly know a family that does not submit to many galling things from connections for the sake of appearances. Has not Mr. Morgan half ruined himself for his brothers, without making them either grateful or happy?"

"He was to blame for giving his money, where it was obviously so little deserved."

"What could he do? He could not see his brothers in want; that would have had a strange appearance to the world. Besides, though he could not regard them on their own account, he might feel kindness for them from respect to the memory of his parents."

"That could not be, for he does not remember his mother, and his father was a bad

man, who always treated him with extraordinary harshness."

"Well then he must have been actuated by regard to his own credit, and might not foresee how much he was to suffer, for part of the money he gave them was only lent; but they do not trouble themselves about repayment. Many people plunder their kindred without any scruple, who pretend to very great honour in pecuniary affairs with others."

"In Mr. Morgan's situation, I would not allow myself to be pillaged by worthless relatives."

"Your character might then suffer, for nothing is more censured than neglect of near relations; no body stays to inquire into circumstances, but condemn without hesitation whatever they think wrong. In short, Louisa, you may as well pretend to torment yourself about bad weather, as at the misery arising from kindred; they are both inevitable

evils: women, particularly, are always at the mercy of their relations; men often contrive to get rid of them."

"Women should do the same when they think it right."

"How nonsensical it is in you to talk of what you think right, when custom is against you!—It would be very pretty, indeed, for a young woman like you to pretend to be wiser than all the world! It would fill volumes, were I to tell you all the distresses which people quietly submit to from relations. You know my frequent visits to my aunt Ashburnham, gave me much opportunity of knowing family grievances of this kind, and I believe they are very generally to be seen wherever one can get a peep behind the curtain. Mrs. Ashburnham was a very sensible woman, and I have often heard her talk upon this subject, *exactly* as I do to you."

"Well, it is needless to contest the matter

farther ; I shall send my letter to Mrs. Elford, and when I get her answer, we can discuss the subject fully.

“ O yes, by all means send your letter ! take your own way upon all occasions, whatever people may think of it ! ”

CHAPTER V.

LOUISA'S mind was much tranquillized by the reference to Mrs. Elford ; resigned to suffer if she could only be assured she acted right, she was sensible that this assurance could not be more effectually secured, than by leaving her conduct to the direction of her eldest sister. On her judgment she had much reliance, and did not apprehend it would be improperly biased by feeling.

She did not long remain in a state of suspense ; a very few days brought her the following letter from Mrs. Elford.

“ TO MISS LOUISA HARGRAVE.

“ My dear Louisa,

“ Whether the request you have made me arises from greater cause of unhappiness than

you acknowledge ; or is merely produced by the circumstances you mention, I shall not inquire. The request I feel kind, and shall comply with it without hesitation, as much reflection on the subject had decided my opinion, before I received your letter.

“ But first, it will be necessary to lay open to you my situation. I ought no longer to have any reserve with you ; perfect knowledge of the circumstances in which we are placed, may conduce to our mutual advantage, and can hardly aggravate our unhappiness. I have much reason to fear, that sooner or later, you will have occasion for all the prudence and fortitude you can exert.

“ You know how ardently I wished to see you all under my roof when Captain Elford could be at home. I waited impatiently for that moment, as the completion of my domestic felicity, and with inexpressible joy, I saw it, at length, arrive. Independent of my attachment to you, I delighted in the thoughts of indulging the tenderness I feel to the memory of my parents, by kindness to the objects of their affection.

“ This happiness was of short duration. Al-

though I did not immediately perceive the fatal tendency of Harriet's behaviour, I lamented it as an interruption to the attention which was due to you and Prudence, from Captain Elford. Her conduct, I attributed merely to gaiety of heart, and too great love of admiration; and his, to good natured indulgence of her foibles. By very slow degrees, I became seriously alarmed; but at length, it was impossible for me not to see, that I was supplanted in his affections.

“To you I hinted my fears without acknowledging the extent of them, and you undertook to hasten her departure. It was fixed for the following morning, but Elford requested it might be postponed a few days, that he might accompany you part of the way. As he had frequently suggested Harriet's passing the Autumn here, I was pleased and surprised at his making no farther opposition to her leaving us, and flattered myself, that though he had not been able to command his affections, he was incapable of wishing to indulge them improperly.

“In the evening, when you were in the nursery, and Prudence and I engaged in

writing, he invited Harriet to take a walk, to which she consented. The anguish that seized me when I saw them depart, made it impossible to proceed with my letter: I quitted the room, and having seen them from the window go through the park, I hurried to the summer-house at the bottom of the garden; where, at a distance from every being, I might give relief to my over-charged heart.

“I went into the inner apartment, of which I kept the key, and there I had been but a very short time, before, to my surprise, they came into the other. Though I had wished to discover myself, I was not in a state to be seen, and I remained quietly in my station. They sat near me, and the partition being thin, I heard distinctly all that they said. Elford talked long in a manner that convinced me, he meant to undermine any principles of virtue Harriet might have. He began cautiously, and proceeded by very artful degrees, to the conclusions he wished. The calmness with which she listened, alarmed me;—but when I heard him afterwards address her in fond and very improper expres-

sions, which she did not discourage, I was persuaded that a little time only was wanting, to complete her destruction.

“ At that moment, I thought I suffered all the pain of which I was capable,—but how much severer was my anguish an hour after, on the sight of my children !

“ The next morning I wrote you the note which hurried your departure, and her leaving the house, afforded me inexpressible relief; for it was to—that alone, I could trust for her safety.

“ Soon after, Elford was seized with a severe illness, in the beginning of which, he proposed that I should invite one of my sisters to return, and said that I should always have one of them with me, to assist and console me in times of fatigue and distress.

“ I told him that it had been your intention to pass the Autumn here, and though you had been unexpectedly obliged to go to Oak Hill, I was certain you would now come to me, if I desired it.

“ He said that Harriet had also talked of remaining, ought I not to invite her first?

“ I answered that she had spoke of it in a
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very slight way, but that you had expressed so earnest a desire to remain, that I should certainly give you the first invitation.

“He coldly replied, that I might invite whom I thought proper, and never again mentioned the subject.

“It was then I felt all the misery of my situation. Although the loss of his affection, and the still more cruel loss of my esteem for him, had rendered me sufficiently wretched; I found that the presence of Harriet would be an insupportable addition to my affliction. Yet I saw it was his intention to bring her to the house; and what objection could I offer?—Though of all rivals, the one that could render me the most unhappy, she was the only one I could not find a shield against. Could I exclude my sister from my house without assigning some extraordinary cause for it? Or, were she in it, could I hope to govern her conduct?—The title of sister would give her privileges, which no other woman durst assume.

“If I meant to live in peace with my husband, it was absolutely necessary that I should conceal my objections to her; and could I

leave him without sacrificing the interest of my children?—For their sakes, I was willing to hide the anguish which preyed on my heart, and to seek in the performance of a mother's duty, support against the misery I endured;—but could I rely upon my fortitude under heavier trials? Should I betray no weakness,—be guilty of no impropriety in the presence of a husband and sister I once tenderly loved, when I saw them stab me to the heart?

“ Often did I ask myself these questions, in the still hours of night, when I watched by his bedside, during his long illness.—You, my dear Louisa, will I hope never know what it is to be a nurse in such circumstances.—None, who have not experienced it, can form a conception of the anguish it occasions, to hang over the bed of sickness, and administer with unremitting care, aid to the man who was once the fondest object of our affection and esteem;—now the destroyer of our peace,—the betrayer of a sister!—Yet to this I must submit, or relinquish my children.—‘ The virtues of women are painful virtues!’—

“ Miserable as I was, I yet indulged the hope of Harriet’s being saved, if she could be prevented from coming here; but this consolation is now torn from me; for I cannot help suspecting, that Captain Elford’s late illness was counterfeited. He left home in perfect health; three days after, he was so ill as to be obliged to break a particular engagement, yet, at the moment it was necessary for him to be at Plymouth, he was again well!

“ This explains to me the facility with which he consented to Harriet’s leaving us in summer; and his visit to Oak Hill would probably have taken place much sooner, had it not been prevented by illness and other interruptions.

“ If I am mistaken,—if Harriet is not yet the victim of her own passions, and of his, it is by you and Prudence she must be saved, for I am convinced that his intentions are completely criminal. To preserve her, you must, my dear sisters, employ every means your understandings can suggest. It was my intention to urge you to this, although you had not written to me upon the subject, and

I should have done so when I wrote to you last, if I had not then been unequal to that painful duty.

“ But if it is now too late, or should she be inaccessible to admonition, I will tell you the conduct I wish you to pursue.—And now, my dear Louisa, prepare to be disappointed, for I am clear, that were even my worst apprehensions realized, the plan which Prudence proposes, is the one you should adopt.

“ I have considered well your objections,—I admit their force, and hope I feel them as I ought; but still they appear to me overbalanced by the consequences which might ensue from separation.

“ Let us first consider the probable effects of it, though the cause should remain unknown.

“ So unexpected, and apparently so unaccountable a measure, would undoubtedly draw upon you severe censure, and occasion very disagreeable conjectures, which would fall chiefly upon you; for the pains Harriet has taken to render herself popular, would secure the general decision in her favour.

“ The world must often be unjust in its

conclusions, because it seldom hesitates to pronounce positively from appearances, and is too frequently influenced by the rank and fortune of individuals. The rich and the gay have great privileges, but a grave young woman of moderate fortune, must be circumspect in her behaviour. Your deviating from the common road of life, would be thought strange singularity;—and the very melancholy which Harriet has occasioned might be regarded as a constitutional defect, that afforded an explanation of your conduct.

“No ordinary rule of life is more generally observed, than regard to the ties of consanguinity. Women particularly, are not permitted to neglect it, and if young unmarried sisters, do not live together, they may expect the censure of their best friends.

“I have seen many sisters, who, without any error in their conduct, could not live happily together, from difference of age, taste, capacity, or interest; yet no allowance is made for this, and sisters are required to maintain by virtue of the ties of blood, that domestic harmony, which has ever been found so difficult of attainment, even by mar-

ried people united by the tenderest ties, and most perfect union of interests.

“ But a much greater objection to separation from Harriet is, that it would probably accelerate the discovery of her misconduct. I have no doubt it would make her behaviour more cautious, but I fear it would have a different effect on Elford. The passion that has carried him so far, will not be easily restrained, and the difficulties which you may be able to throw in the way of their meeting, if she continues to reside with you, are likely to be the most effectual means of preventing their intercourse.

“ The discovery of their disgrace, I should anxiously avert for your sake, not less than my own; although its consequences to me would be very fatal. My residence with my husband would then be improper, while our separation would be unfortunate for our children, whom I cannot have the least hope that he would permit to reside with me. It is for their sakes alone, I now remain with him. If they would not suffer from the loss of a mother,—dearly as I love them, I would yet resign them, rather than suffer the misery,

or submit to the meanness of living upon amicable terms with a man, whom I think so unworthy. The poverty to which I should be reduced by voluntary separation from him, I would entirely disregard.

“ You may perhaps say, that if I can live with him now for the sake of my family, I might continue to do so although his conduct were known.

“ Supposing for a moment, that my residence with him then would not be more unhappy, yet the effect it might have upon others, would not permit it.

“ Few people in this county are unacquainted with the situation of Captain Buxton and Captain Severn. The latter is a young unmarried man, who keeps two mistresses that are sisters. This was no sooner known in the town, where he was lately quartered, than he was deserted by all his acquaintance excepting his military associates.

“ Captain Buxton is a man advanced in life, who is married to an amiable and handsome woman by whom he has a family; yet he has seduced her sister, and is at no trouble to keep his connexion with her a secret.

His conduct however, passes unpunished. It is talked of by many with indignation, but his place in society is not affected by it. Why is he treated so differently from Severn, although his transgressions ought to excite much greater disapprobation? It is because his wife chooses to appear blind to them. No one supposes it possible she can be ignorant, and her deep melancholy makes her the object of general pity; but for the sake of her children, she continues to reside with him, and for her sake, many are willing to overlook his iniquity, or think they have no title to avenge her injuries, since she is not disposed to do it herself.

“But what may be expected from her conduct? Can any thing be more pernicious to the morals of the young officers who are hourly thrown in the way of Captain Buxton, than seeing profligacy thus tolerated? Must it not weaken their abhorrence of vice, and render them fearless of following his example?

“Never, I hope, my dear Louisa, shall any act of mine give such encouragement to immorality. I am willing to sacrifice myself for my family; but I will not knowingly act

in a manner, which may be productive of the most baneful consequences to thousands of families.

“ These are the views I take of my situation, as far as it can be affected by Harriet, but to you the disclosure of her character might prove more unfortunate than you are aware of.

“ At present you think nothing can be more painful than intimate association with an immoral character ; but you have not yet known the feeling of disgrace, or can imagine how low the sense of it would sink you. Nor is this the worst I have to dread for you. Time might restore you to tranquillity, but Harriet’s fate might prevent you and Prudence from forming those connexions in life, to which you are entitled. Many of your own sex would be averse to intimacy with you, and though some men would not be afraid to marry you, few would want friends to remind them that you were all branches of the same tree.

“ Nothing is more certain, than that the most opposite characters are to be found in the same family ; yet it is no less certain that a whole family is often involved in the dis-

grace of one, which renders the virtuous almost as unhappy at the misconduct of their near relations, as if they were themselves the guilty persons. Nothing can be more unjust,—nothing more opposite to reason and humanity!—So cruel a slavery it is to be hoped, will one day cease, but it cannot at present be combated by an individual; it must be submitted to as one of the inevitable calamities of life.

“Consider well these things, my dear Louisa;—have a little patience, and I hope it will please heaven, to relieve you from Harriet by agreeable means. It would give me infinite pain to see you doomed to pass your days in sorrow and in solitude, when you are formed to fill a distinguished place in society, with peculiar honour to yourself and happiness to others.

“My joy in life is for ever gone,—but to see you in peace and comfort, will be one of the greatest consolations, which can now await

“Your most affectionate sister,

“FRANCES ELFORD.”

Northfield, Nov. 25.

This letter added to the sorrow, while it decided the conduct of Louisa. Though she did not feel perfectly satisfied with Mrs. Elford's advice, yet concern for her misfortunes, and the high respect she entertained for her understanding, prevented any hesitation in submitting to her decision.

Louisa's unfortunate attachment to Treilian, made her so careless of her own interest, and rendered her marrying so improbable, that she would not from any regard to herself, have complied with the wishes of Mrs. Elford; but in promoting her peace, she found a compensation for any thing she could personally suffer, and was too diffident of her own judgment to believe that she could be right, when she differed in opinion from her.

To Miss Hargrave, Mrs. Elford's letter was a matter of high exultation. It gave her a triumph, that excited an uncommon degree of self-satisfaction, and made her join Louisa in the most amicable manner, in composing the letter they thought proper to write to Harriet. Their feelings on the subject of it

were too strong, and their judgment too decided, to permit any difficulty in expressing their sentiments, and they accomplished their letter in a manner that inspired the hope of its having all the effect, which any remonstrance from them could have.

Harriet gave no reply, but showed to them in private, the same reserved behaviour which they observed to her.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSTANTIA had now the satisfaction of seeing her father and mother daily recovering tranquillity, and as her eldest brother remained quiet, she began to hope that fortune might yet be propitious, and restore them to comfort.

But hardly had this expectation been indulged, before they were assailed by a new and most unlooked-for affliction, which in a moment blasted all her hopes of their returning peace.

One morning as she was sitting at work with her mother and some visitors, she was called out of the room by Mrs. Finch the housekeeper, a respectable old woman who had been long in the family.

Mrs. Finch informed her, that a country-man had come with a message, which he would deliver to no one but herself, and that he had been directed to inquire for Mrs. Finch, and desire that she would get him an opportunity of speaking to Miss Orville, without the knowledge of the family.

Constantia was surprised and alarmed at a message coming to her in so secret a manner, and her fears were not lessened, when, upon seeing the man, he delivered to her a note addressed in her brother Philip's hand.

She hastily opened it, and found it dated from a farm-house in the neighbourhood, whither he requested she would immediately come, as he had business of consequence to communicate to her; but begged she would carefully conceal from his father and mother that he was in the country.

She desired the messenger to return and say that she would instantly follow. The farm being but a short walk from the Abbey, and the weather good, she could easily go

go without exciting suspicion ; and she only stayed to put on her cloak and bonnet, anxiously revolving in her mind as she went, all the causes she could conjecture for his coming in so unexpected a manner.

Upon arriving at the house, she was kindly met by her brother, who appeared in his usual health and spirits, but upon inquiring the cause of his being there, he did not answer, and seemed under some embarrassment.

Soon, however, recovering himself, he told her that he did not expect she would be pleased with the occasion of their meeting, yet he hoped she would exercise some lenity, and give his father and mother intelligence of it in the most favourable manner.

He paused, while Constantia looked in fearful expectation of what was to follow.

“ It would be idle,” resumed he, “ to waste time in fruitless attempts to soften the matter to you ; I shall tell you at once,——but don’t

be so much alarmed—you have nothing very extraordinary to hear.”

She begged he would tell her quickly.

“I will not,” he replied, “torment you with circumlocution,—in a word then, I came to Ramsgate last night to meet a lady, who—in short your acquaintance Mrs. Melfont intends this day to elope with me.”

“Impossible!” cried Constantia, with a look and voice of consternation; “it is impossible!”

“Impossible!” he repeated, “why should it be impossible? are elopements so uncommon?”

“Do not bid me believe it; it cannot be!”

“Indeed it can; I see no occasion for all this surprise.”

“Has she no consideration for her husband?”

“Not so much as for me.”

“Has she no honour? no sense of duty?”

“Would it not be absurd to pass her life disagreeably with Melfont, when she can be happy with another?”

“And can you be so cruel—so base—as to take her from him?”

“She has fixed her affections upon me.”

“And shows them in the most unprincipled manner!”

“Constantia!”

“Can you value such affection?”

“I did not send for you, girl, to catechise me.”

“Oh! Philip, she is a mother!”

“Yes, and her children will be very well taken care of by their father.”

“Can that satisfy the feelings of a mother!”

“Pho! you are a child yourself to fancy she should make herself miserable for children, who will do perfectly well without her.”

“Good Heaven! how can you talk thus? Have pity for her, and throw her not thus disgracefully out of society.”

“She has little to fear; Melfont will immediately obtain a divorce, and then I shall marry her:—All this is very easy.”

“Easy!”

“Yes, is it not often done?—All will go very well.”

“Have you no principle?—No——”

“Have you a mind,” interrupted he, “to anticipate the sermon, which we may expect from the learned Judge on the occasion? In spite of his endeavours to make the verdicts of juries lessons of morality to the public, they are generally very lenient. What was six thousand pounds to my friend Matthew? Besides, damages are not taken.”

“ You will break my father and mother’s heart.”

“ For a while they will be distressed, but they will recover and forgive me.”

“ Never.”

“ Ridiculous!—What can they do, when the thing is over, and can’t be remedied?”

“ Their displeasure should be lasting.”

“ Your ideas, child, are so very peculiar and local, that you can’t imagine how difficult it is to converse with you.”

“ Don’t let us dispute, but let me implore for your own sake—for that of every friend who is dear to you, that you will abandon your design.”

“ Why all this scrupulosity in you, Constantia, who were so lenient to Mrs. Anfield, although you knew her to be a kept-mistress?”

“ Is it possible that you do not see that she could not be half so culpable as Mrs. Mel-

font? The very care she took to prevent my associating with her, which, from ignorance of her situation, I was in danger of doing, showed that she had a sense of virtue, whatever might be her condition; and if we knew her history, we might find many palliations of her conduct; but what apology can be offered for Mrs. Melfont, which does not criminate you?"

"You make nice distinctions, my dear, which it would be fantastic to observe in our commerce with mankind. The pleasure of life would be destroyed, were we to weigh people's merit by grains and scruples. I am content to take them as they are; you would preposterously attempt to make them what they should be."

"I have no such presumption."

"Indeed you will find the preaching stiff morality, a very quixotic business. I am told that Woodford wanted to make you a Countess, but he mistook you quite; you would have made a Monk of him."

“ Oh ! Philip, this levity is unsupportable ; you distract me.”

“ I sent for you, Constantia, from real kindness, lest you should hear of Mrs. Melfont’s elopement in a more disagreeable way ; I beg you will consider this, and not fatigue yourself with fruitless repinings at an event which is inevitable.”

“ Is it then inevitable ? Is there not one just or amiable feeling, which can have the least weight with you ?”

“ I am sorry to see you thus agitated, but my resolution is taken, and I have only to entreat that you will inform my father and mother in the gentlest manner.”

“ For their sakes, I shall endeavour to soften the intelligence,—yet how !——”

She stopt and burst into tears.

“ I beg,” said her brother, “ you will compose yourself ; you know you can temper their minds as you think proper.”

“Can I say a syllable in extenuation of your conduct? They know that you never saw Mrs. Melfont, till she was a wife and mother, nor till Mr. Melfont entertained you hospitably in his house. Oh! Philip, Philip!”

“Perhaps, Constantia, I have spoken of this affair too lightly; but I have gone too far to recede, and must brave the consequences as well as I can.”

“It cannot be too late to recede.”

“It is some months since I was decidedly engaged to her. A short time before, Melfont was obliged to go to Ireland, and by letters she had from him last week, he may be expected in town immediately; she has therefore left it to avoid seeing him, and in an hour we are to meet. The die is cast, be the event what it may.”

He then bid her hastily adieu.

In a most perturbed and distracted state of mind, Constantia directed her steps homewards. Although not new to distress, this

misfortune, while it rent her heart for the misery into which it would plunge her father and mother, was of such a nature, that her sense of justice and humanity forbade her even desiring to allay the grief, or moderate the indignation it inspired.

Mrs. Almorne, (to whom she immediately wished to communicate her distress,) was unluckily twelve miles distant on a visit, and was not expected to return till the next day; but Constantia could not delay a moment to request her advice and assistance. She wrote to her instantly of her brother's situation, and entreated that she would yet make some endeavour, if she did not think it chimerical, to prevent Mrs. Melfont from executing her design.

CHAPTER XIV.



As soon as Mrs. Almorne received Constantia's letter, she went to Ramsgate to try to obtain a meeting with Mrs. Melfont, with whom she was well acquainted. Although she feared that her journey would be to no purpose, yet while a possibility of the contrary remained, she would not relinquish the attempt.

She went directly to Mrs. Hanson, from whom, as her husband was the intimate acquaintance of Mr. Melfont, she might expect to hear of her.

Mrs. Hanson immediately informed her, that Mrs. Melfont and Colonel Orville had left Ramsgate two hours before, and had been at so little trouble to conceal their inten-

tion, that their elopement was already the subject of public conversation. She told her likewise, that when Mr. Hanson was in town, in August, he was convinced from the behaviour of Mrs. Melfont, that she was then engaged in a criminal connexion with Colonel Ornvillè ; that she did not even seem anxious to preserve appearances, though she corresponded regularly and frequently with her husband ; and that, by a letter from Mr. Melfont to Mr. Hanson, a few days ago, he did not appear to have any suspicion of his wife's infidelity. She added, that Mrs. Melfont had been publicly talked of for her gallantry with different men, before she met with Colonel Ornvillè.

Upon receiving this intelligence, Mrs. Al-morne was sensible that no time ought to be lost in acquainting Sir John and Lady Ornvillè ; and she immediately bent her course towards the Abbey, resolving to take upon herself the charge of informing them, although her heart sunk in despair at the thoughts of it. She felt it a very different task from that she had formerly undertaken, with regard to their eldest

son. The information they had then received, admitted of some management, and could be regarded in extenuating points of view. It was easy for them to suppose, that affection for Sally Cusliffe, and gratitude for her care and tenderness, might lead him to believe that she was amiable and affectionate; and that youth, ignorance, and an unfortunate situation, had been the chief causes of her errors; while Lady Orville, who was little disposed to reason deeply, or take comprehensive views of human affairs, could find in the prospect of Sally's reformation, hope of oblivion of the past, and consolation for the future.

But the case of Philip was widely different; his conduct involved interests which precluded alleviation of the affliction at present, or hope of it in future.

The discovery of it to his father and mother, Mrs. Almorne found a most painful, but not a tedious duty. At the first sentence, which looked like preparation for calamity, Lady Orville, taught by experience, became

alarmed, and Mrs. Almorne found it necessary to disclose the intelligence without delay.

The lowered tone of Lady Orville's spirits, prevented her being so violently affected as on her former trial; but it sunk deep into her heart, and Mrs. Almorne saw that the impression would be lasting.

Sir John put so many questions to Mrs. Almorne respecting what she knew of the conduct of Philip and Mrs. Melfont, that she could conceal from him but little of what Mrs. Hanson had told her. The distress it gave him, if not deeper, was more visible than Lady Orville's. The conduct of his eldest son had afflicted and humiliated,—that of his youngest, shocked and exasperated him; and he showed an indignation, which, Lady Orville said, she had never seen him discover on any other occasion.

Accustomed now to distress, she endeavoured to suppress her own feelings, in the hope of softening his; but he neither made any attempt to conceal or subdue his resentment.

“The women,” said he to Mrs. Almorne, “whom my sons have chosen for their wives, are both most repugnant to my feelings; but the behaviour of my sons themselves, excite very different sensations. If Hastings would keep Sally Cusliffe in obscurity, his marrying her might, perhaps, be pardonable; but Philip’s conduct is at once cruel and dishonourable to the family of Mrs. Melfont, and most pernicious in its consequences to society.”

“Permit me,” said Mrs. Almorne, “to observe as an alleviation of your concern, that it is very doubtful if Melfont is a man who will be much affected by the loss of his wife, and she may possibly have found him a disagreeable companion.”

“That,” replied Sir John, “might perhaps have proved an excuse for separation, but it is no excuse for depriving herself of the power of doing her duty to her children: the less he is deserving, the more they require a mother’s care.”

“ If Melfont is fond of his wife,” returned Mrs. Almerne, “ he may be pitied ; for,

“ Where ignorance is bliss,

“ ’Tis folly to be wise.”

but his children are very fortunate in escaping the influence of such a woman.”

“ Does Philip think so? And does he therefore hope that at a convenient time, she will be carried off from his children? Is this the apology he is to offer Melfont?”

“ He may think him undeserving of his wife, and that she was unhappy with him.”

“ Did she make Philip her confidant as a friend, before she regarded him as a lover? If either dislike to Melfont, or partiality for another, determined her to the step she has taken, ought she to have deceived her husband?—She led him to believe that she was faithful to her vows, at the very moment she was carrying on a criminal intercourse with another!”

“ I am not disposed,” resumed Sir John,

after a pause, “ to judge severely of the failings of women. However I may deplore the gallantry of many in high life, I can often find much excuse for it. I cannot expect correct morals in women who have been married early in life, to dissolute men, and who are led to infidelity by the example, and even with the consent of their husbands. I pity also, perhaps, more than I blame, a very young woman, who, like Mrs. South, is seduced by the unprincipled, unfeeling, unceasing arts of a Mr. Templeton; and I would treat with much lenity the errors of those who are dependent upon bad husbands, or who have been obliged to marry against their inclination, when their affections were pre-engaged; but the conduct of Mrs. Melfont must be regarded in a very different light; and at all events, that man ought never to be pardoned, who seduces a woman from her duty, as a wife or mother.”

“ But it is not always certain who is the seducer: on this occasion, I should from obvious causes, suspect it was the lady.”

“ That she is the most guilty,” said Sir

John, "I have not a doubt. Even bold unprincipled men will seldom continue the pursuit of a married woman, if they meet with discouragement, and a wife must be *very young* or simple, if she does not find it easy to repel the very first approaches to gallantry. It is not therefore, credible that Mrs. Melfont would ever have been thought of by so young a man, if she had not been the seducer."

"This affords some apology for Philip."

"If it lessens his guilt, it increases his folly: for what man of sense or feeling, would involve himself in marriage with a woman, who, in Mrs. Melfont's situation, could make the first advances?"

"You must make some allowance for youthful passions in such circumstances. He may have been misled by vanity; for he is persuaded of her regard for him, and I have observed that men are generally more vulnerable in this respect than women, from being much less accustomed to flattering attentions."

“Vanity may be an excuse for some errors, but the character must be weak and mean, that can be flattered by the regard of a woman who indulges a criminal passion.”

“I am afraid that is more wisdom than is to be expected from very young men.”

“Philip, Madam, is young, but he is neither a boy, nor a blockhead; there might be some excuse for him if he were deficient in understanding.”

“With the best understanding, a very young man is easily flattered, and easily won. It is sometimes indeed, very difficult for any man not to mistake passion for affection, and the allurements of art for the affects of tenderness.”

“Men,” replied Sir John, “may be thus deceived, when they have no means of judging of a woman, except by her language and manners; but did not Philip know that Mrs. Melfont was a wife and a mother? I shall even do them the favour

to suppose, that they were insensibly involved in a passion for each other,—but on the first suspicion of it, ought they not to have separated?—There are some acts, which, on reflection, a good man can see in only one point of view; and Mrs. Melfont's desertion of her children is one of them. Could she have the heart of a mother, and leave them?—Could she risk their being neglected or exposed to the evils which may result from a step-mother?—Has she no feeling for their sufferings, when they shall be old enough to blush for the ignominy of their mother?—Some of the most unamiable, selfish people I have ever known, have been very affectionate and careful parents; but never did I know a *single* instance of a good woman, who was an indifferent mother. Modesty, chastity, fidelity, may possibly cease to be regarded as virtues; but while human nature remains the same, the duty of a mother is a virtue which can never die."

"To these truths Philip is insensible at present; but when he comes to be a father, they will sink deep into his mind."

“ A Father!—How can he ever be certain that Mrs. Milfont’s children are his? If she is faithless to Melfont, what is to secure her fidelity to him? She may indeed be cautious in transgressing, as she cannot manœuvre herself a third time into matrimony, but on the integrity of such a woman I can place no reliance. Unless men are indifferent whether they are surrounded by their own offspring or those of another, they should not make such marriages.”

“ But a man is always willing to believe, that the woman he loves, will be constant to him, however faithless she has been to others. Self-love and strong passion produce wondrous easy faith.”

“ Philip may deceive himself, but not me, and I will never see him more. Whatever misery this resolution may cost me, I will be steady in it, since I consider his conduct as the violation of those ties, which are the foundation of all private or public morality, and the great means of promoting the happiness of the human race.”

“ It is, perhaps, but justice to Philip to observe, that he may have been unwarily entangled, and obliged to make a sacrifice of himself to her interest. When a man has endangered a woman’s being divorced, it is thought dishonourable if he does not replace her in society.”

“ Replace her!—as if her place in society should depend merely on a ceremony, or that it should be in the power of a bad man to give her respectability or not as he pleases!”

“ I hope you cannot imagine,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ that my sentiments differ from yours upon this subject. What I urge in excuse for Philip, is merely for the sake of your own peace, that you may not view his conduct in a worse light than it justly deserves. I have heard you regret the fate of Mr. Lennington, who is the victim of a similar marriage.”

“ It is true, I think him deserving of an infinitely better lot ; but young men should be taught, that whatever their good qualities may be, they will not be allowed, even in a mo-

ment of infatuation, the immoral indulgence of their passions.

It is to be regretted, that the law does not prohibit such marriages. If it did, Mrs. Melfont might never have seduced Philip; for she does not, like many deserters from their husbands, give a proof of her passion, by the worldly advantages she relinquishes. Had she had a spark of generous affection for him, she would not have been the means of fixing an unfortunate stain upon him for life. Many a woman, in the most adverse circumstances, has had the magnanimity to refuse marrying the man she loved, when it might be injurious to his interest; and can such a woman as Mrs. Melfont be thought fit to resume her place in society by marrying her gallant?"

"It has been said," observed Mrs. Almorne, "that it would be a cruel law, which prevented a seducer from restoring a woman to the situation from which he had dragged her, and thus by driving her to a state of prostitution, cut her off from repentance."

“ Yes ; to reward vice is a likely means to produce repentance ! ”

“ It is in pity, some men say, for the unfortunate women, that they oppose an alteration of the law in this respect ; yet it is certain, that several of the most deplorable divorces which have taken place, have originated in the unfeeling disposition, and unprincipled arts of the women.

There are obvious causes for many men being very indulgent to female frailty ; yet I am astonished there is any one, who does not perceive, that the allowing an adulteress to marry her seducer, must lead to all the horrid depravity of French or German manners. Better far, that even such women as Lady Anrose should sometimes be the victims of misfortune, than that a privilege should continue which is so pernicious in its consequences.”

“ Some very respectable men in distinguished stations,” said Sir John, “ have approved of women having this liberty, on the ground of its being their only means of escape

from the power of tyrannical or worthless husbands. Their knowledge of the hard condition of many wives led them to this conclusion."

"What a picture does this present! What miseries must be acknowledged incident to the married state, when respectable men would even leave an avenue to vice open, rather than preclude relief?"

"Their argument might be admissible, if it were only unfortunate wives, who fled to this refuge; but whoever is acquainted with the trials for adultery, which have taken place in Britain and Ireland, must have observed, that although in some cases, the characters of the guilty persons were otherwise unexceptionable, and that there were many excuses for their error; yet in general the conduct of the parties has indicated the most unfeeling dispositions and licentious manners. The ties of consanguinity, of friendship, and of humanity, have all been grossly violated; yet the men who are thus guilty, pass unpunished.— And these men pretend to talk of honour!—

Mrs. Horley, a woman of thirty-six, indulges a criminal passion, without any seductive arts having been employed by her lover, and deliberately tells her husband, that she had fixed her affections upon his friend ! This friend, Mr. Adder, (whom for years Mr. Horley had believed to be his friend,) when he knew that she was prepared to leave her husband, writes to him, that pleased with her preference, he had not discouraged it; and although he would not desire her to leave him, yet if she did so, he should think himself obliged by every principle of love and honour, to receive her !”

“ Where had his honour been sculking till that moment ?”

“ I can never, Madam, think of the condition of many of your sex without indignation. Among the lower classes, numbers of young and helpless beings are made the miserable victims of prostitution ; a second class, your unfortunate wives, are obliged to be the slaves of worthless men, if they have too much virtue to release themselves by adul-

tery ;— while a third violate the first duties with impunity, and, protected by fashion and fortune, appear in public with splendour and unblushing ease.”

“ An alteration in the marriage laws,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ would, in my opinion, be one of the most essential measures that could be adopted for the promotion of true virtue.”

“ Many think,” replied Sir John, “ that in these times, instead of relaxing laws, which they call the bonds for preserving morality, they ought to be drawn tighter ; and they should be so, as far as they can prove a check upon infidelity ; but in other respects, a change in them would be for the advantage of morals. Can virtue be promoted by good characters being chained for life to worthless beings ?”

“ The contrary appears to me so evident,” answered Mrs. Almorne, “ that I can hardly imagine how any person, who has been a careful observer of domestic life, and has considered attentively the various causes by which the sentiments and actions of human beings

are influenced, can expect morality to prevail, while the present system of marriage-laws subsists. It is impossible that a woman, particularly, can be capable of fulfilling the moral duties, or of inspiring her children with just sentiments, if she finds her interest through life interwoven with her obedience to, and support of a villain. There is scarcely indeed, a folly or wickedness, which I have not known a woman commit from the necessity of submission to a husband; while she also proves a protection to him from the just indignation of others. Often are iniquities pardoned in a man for the sake of his wife; because, however great his offences, if they happen to escape the cognizance of the law, she must remain dependent upon him.

In considering the subject of marriage, I think chiefly of the condition of women, as they are the greatest sufferers; yet I am not fond of talking of their rights, which have unfortunately been promulgated by a lady, who, though I respect her intentions, has done more harm than good to the cause she espoused."

“ It is indeed much to be regretted,” returned Sir John, “ that Mrs. Wolstoncraft became the defender of the Rights of Women, although she deserved credit for having asserted them. The state of the public mind, at the time she published, and the importance of the subject, much more in my opinion, than the merit of her work, obtained it general notice, and raised her too high in the estimation of many ; while the disclosure of her conduct, has since sunk her, perhaps, too low in the opinion of others. She certainly possessed a vigorous mind, and an independent spirit ; but her opinions were not original ; most of them are to be found in the letters of her friend Mrs. Macaulay upon education, and Mrs. Wolstoncraft appears to me, to have been *very far* from possessing the good sense or qualities requisite, for promoting either her own, or the sentiments of another to advantage.”

“ It is unfortunate,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ that any efforts in favour of the female sex should be ill conducted ; for surely no candid or generous man will deny, that their lot in

general is calamitous.—But is it not extraordinary, that no man thinks of proposing an alteration in the marriage-laws, except one which would fail entirely, and, it must be owned, sometimes most cruelly, upon women? Have the men, who feel so much pity for the unfortunate women who are *guilty*, none for the unfortunate women who are *innocent*?—The slightest view of the condition of women must show them, I should think, the numerous indignities to which wives are exposed, and from which no rank is exempt. There is not a more amiable or exemplary woman in Britain than Lady Waldeck. She had long borne, with much patience, the ill temper and numerous gallantries of her lord, but at length ventured, for the sake of her children, to remonstrate against his amours with her nursery maids; the consequence of which was, that he locked her into a room, threw her on the floor, and beat her, till she was rescued by one of her servants, more daring than the rest!

Yet, if from a just abhorrence of immorality, or any gross treatment, short of personal violence, a woman should leave her

husband, she is deprived of every shilling!—For great acts of cruelty, a divorce and maintenance is obtainable, but the process by which a divorce is obtained, is long and expensive. Years may elapse before the husband can be compelled even to appear to it, while the wife in the mean time, if separated from him, has no allowance; nor can she hope to obtain from the most profligate infidelity of her husband, unless his adultery is accompanied by incest, such a divorce as will permit her to marry again!”

“I can only explain,” replied Sir John, “the opposition which amiable and respectable men make to meliorate the condition of women with respect to marriage, by their having had little opportunity of knowing domestic situations, or by their being too much hurried away by one set of feelings.

The great argument opposed to the separation of married couples, is the interest of their children; yet it is obvious, that, in many cases, no persons can be worse guardians of them than the parents. A child is as frequently the victim of a father’s worthlessness, as his wife; but were she more independent,

his faults would not only be restrained, but it would be more in her power to counteract the effect of his conduct with regard to his offspring; while in cases of irreclaimable depravity, an early separation would prevent children from being brought into the world to increase the sum of general vice and calamity.

It has been urged as an objection to granting a woman a divorce, that the children remain with the guilty party; but I see no necessity for this. Her female children ought certainly to be placed under her care, and her sons may still be nearly as much with her, as sons generally are with a mother, after infancy. The case of Mrs. Melfont is entirely different, who at once cuts herself off for life, from every means of intercourse with her family."

"But what argument have men to oppose to granting a divorce to a woman who has no children, or who is already separated from her husband, and obliged to seek the protection of the law from his violence? Many women are married against their inclination, or at an age when it is impossible they can

be capable of making a judicious choice ; yet, if their husbands prove brutes, they must continue victims for life, while the husbands may enjoy, without restraint, every vicious pleasure.

It may perhaps be thought, that if a woman had the privilege of divorcing her husband for infidelity or bad usage, he would provoke her to it whenever he wished to marry another ; but this objection may be obviated by refusing a man in such a case, the liberty of marrying again during the life of his wife.

It has been said, that if a divorce could be obtained from the commission of adultery by the husband, it was to be feared the cases would multiply, and it might lead to such opening for disunion, as could only be calculated by looking at the fatal effects of it in France. There have been so many causes for the corruption of morals in the French, that it is impossible to ascertain what has been the precise effect of any one ordinance on that people ; but happily we have no occasion to go so far for an example of the effect of granting divorces on account of the com-

mission of adultery by the husband. We can form a much juster opinion of it, by looking to the neighbouring kingdom, Scotland, where it is the law ; yet there, a divorce at the instance of a woman is a very rare occurrence, although a decree of divorce is granted for the Non-adherence of a husband, as well as by his committing adultery. This affords an incontestible proof how little women are disposed to take advantage of such a privilege. The fact is, they are generally too fond mothers not to submit to a great deal of bad usage, rather than part from their children ; innumerable instances of which I have seen. They have besides, too many other temptations to retain the situation they derive from their husbands, to be easily disposed to part from them ; and the latter have it too much in their power to conceal their amours, if they choose to do so, to put it often in the power of a wife to obtain a divorce. It becomes therefore peculiarly hard to deny them wholly a privilege, which might have the greatest effect in at least restraining the open, unfeeling, insolent profligacy of husbands : for however indifferent men may be about

their wives, they would for the sake of their children, be cautious of giving them cause for divorce.

No person who is well acquainted with England and Scotland, but must be struck with the superior morality of the generality of Scotchmen with regard to conjugal fidelity, even though the Scotch women are very far from being treated in other respects with proper consideration; and I have the strongest reason to believe, that the privilege they possess of divorcing their husbands, has had a considerable share in restraining the progress of gallantry in that country. 'The superior virtue of Scotch women as wives, is very remarkable, and is a natural result of the more correct conduct of their husbands.'

"There can be no doubt, Madam," said Sir John, "that it is chiefly by restraining the vices of men, that we can hope to see women what they should be: yet Englishmen, who boast of being the most humane, generous, enlightened people!—celebrated for their love of justice, and of liberty! deprive women of every privilege which can prevent or restrain the exercise

of meanness, tyranny, or vice in themselves as husbands!——

While the consideration of a remedy for the hardships to which women are subjected, must interest the wishes, and excite the exertions of the Just and Humane, they ought to attend to one great truth, which is equally applicable to women, as to all the different classes of mankind.

To look for Justice from the mere assent of reason, all experience tells us is a hopeless expectation. The diffusion of property is the only circumstance which has put the bulk of mankind in a condition to understand, and wrest from the selfishness of others their just rights; and till women have the place and weight which property confers, in vain may they appeal to Justice.

I would not demand for a wife an equal power over her husband's property, especially if she brought him none; but surely that woman is not fit to be a wife or mother, who cannot be trusted with an independent right to such a share of his fortune, as may prevent her from being a slave. Civilization of manners, may in many instances, prevent

the want of it from being felt ; but in general, wives are too dependent to act with the freedom that is necessary to Peace or Virtue.

Fathers should consider this in their settlements upon daughters. Although I have no doubt that with regard to Sir Robert Horndon, such a precaution is unnecessary ; yet, on this principle, the interest of the money which I have bequeathed to Lady Horndon, is settled upon herself for her sole and separate use ; and the principal she may bequeath, but cannot dispose of during the life of her husband ; and I have, as you know, declared in my Will, that it is thus settled ; because I think it is a father's duty, when it is in his power, to make his daughter, to a certain degree at least, independent even of her husband."

CHAPTER XV.

THE apprehensions which Mrs. Almorne entertained for the effect of Philip's conduct on his mother, were not mistaken. Time did not soften the distress it occasioned either to her or Sir John. His appearance only betrayed his concern, for he never spoke upon the subject; but in his absence, Lady Ornaville would seldom talk of any other. Her pride had been more wounded by her eldest son; but the more she reflected on the conduct of her youngest, the more painfully did it rankle in her mind.

One morning when she was sitting quietly at work with her daughter and Mrs. Almorne, the latter addressing Constantia, said, "My old shoe-maker, Dalling, has given up business, can you recommend another?"

“Fieldhouse, whom we employ,” answered Constantia, “is a very good one.”

“But the best in Ramsgate,” said Lady Ornvile, “Harriet Hargrave says, is Ever-son, who is employed by all the people of fashion.”

“Then,” replied Mrs. Almore, “he is not the one I seek. I wish to find out some good poor man, who has a family to support.”

“No sooner had Mrs. Almore said these words, than Lady Ornvile’s countenance changed, and a minute after, she burst into tears.”

“Ah, Mrs. Almore,” she cried, “what a lesson do you give me! I never led my children to think thus of the poor and the good, or they would not now have so grievously afflicted me.”

“My dear Madam,” said Mrs. Almore, in the kindest accents, “do not, I beseech you, indulge such reflections; young men will

form improper connections in every situation."

"It is not to their connections alone, I allude; their behaviour has always been indiscreet, and I can trace my own misconduct through the whole of it. I have long been afraid of this, but my eyes were never fully opened till now, when I see too plainly that I have stamped the fate of all my sons.—From the infancy of Hastings, I indulged him in all his fancies to such a degree, that when he was but a youth, he could bear no control, and gave himself up entirely to his pleasures.

With Frederic I had less in my power, for his father, taught by the example of Hastings, would not permit me to have the same opportunities of injuring him; yet I have had much influence on his fortune. Lord Hargrave was extremely fond of him, and when he was going Ambassador to the court of ———, he wished to take Frederic with him, and train him for the diplomatic line. He thought he had talents, which with the support his connections could give him, might insure his success; but I was so very miserable at the

idea of long separations from him, that Lord Hargrave gave up the thought of it, and Sir John never heard of the proposal."

"He could settle to such advantage in London," replied Mrs. Almorne, "that you cannot justly reproach yourself with having injured his fortune."

"I must reproach myself for having been guided only by feeling; and he might very probably never have been a gamester, if he had been in the habits and pursuits to which Lord Hargrave would have led him.

With respect to Philip, I was no less blameable. When he was a fine spirited boy of fifteen, he showed great ardour for a military life, and his father intended to put him in a regiment of foot, and could have placed him in a regiment, the officers of which were most respectable men, and some of them our intimate friends, who would have been at pains to form him properly; but I, afraid of his being removed to a distance, endeavoured privately to inspire him with a desire to go into the Guards, and succeeded. His father

yielded to his intreaties and mine, but since the day he entered London, he has been so thoughtless and dissipated, that we have had little of his company, and now cannot desire it."

"You did not foresee these things, my dear friend, or you would have acted differently."

"I might have foreseen them, if I had listened to advice; but I consulted only my inclinations. Often did Sir John warn me of my errors, but as he could not alter my opinions, his expostulations were vain. The fulfilment of his predictions has done, what his reasoning could not effect.—Would to Heaven, I had been like him. His inclination always yields to his sense of duty, although his feelings are as tender as a woman's. Even now, though we agree about Philip, his disapprobation springs from purer motives than mine. I am chiefly indignant, because I feel that I could never forgive the woman, who should rob me of my husband."

“ He is actuated by the same feeling.”

“ But more generously: he weighs circumstances impartially, and thinks of Mrs. Melfont as a mother, as well as a wife; but I am so much affected by the feelings of the latter, that I am not sufficiently awake to other considerations.—Oh! Mrs. Almorne, what joy would be in life if we could not be a moment secure, that the guest whom we treat with hospitality and kindness, or the friend we have long cherished, would not plunge a dagger into our hearts?—Philip is the most cruel of all afsafsins!”

Mrs. Almorne could say nothing to soften these reflections, and remained silent.

“ How much,” said Lady Ornaville, after a pause, “ did I please myself lately with the hope of seeing him here at Christmas, as usual; but he and Hastings are now both lost to me.—Happy was I in them before they were seven years old; but after that age, little security has a mother for comfort in sons. Their education, their very amusements,—

the whole business of their lives detaches them from her, till a wife or mistress gives a finishing blow to their separation."

"A mother has certainly a greater chance of happiness in a daughter."

"Often have I trembled for the marriage of my sons.—Can you tell me, Madam, why men become so frequently indifferent about their mothers after marriage?—The tenderness of a daughter to her parents is seldom diminished by matrimony."

"It is not easy to account for it, but very little knowledge of mankind ascertains the fact. It is even proverbial. { 'When your daughter becomes a wife, you gain a son; when your son marries you lose one.' "

"Is it from men's passions being stronger, that they become more engrossed by the object of their love?

"No attachment can be stronger than what is often felt by a wife for her husband; and

from various causes her conduct might be expected to undergo a much greater alteration on marriage, yet it is not the case."

"Perhaps the jealousy of a wife makes her endeavour to estrange her husband from his kindred."

"That will sometimes happen; but not so often as to solve your question."

"One cause," said Lady Orville, "of a son's neglect of his mother may be, that old women are seldom respected by men. I believe indeed, that the mother who estimates herself by her son's value for her, whether he is married or not, will find that she is of very small importance in the creation. You will tell me, that this is owing to women being often so insignificant from want of cultivation of mind, that when they lose the charms of youth, they must become, in the eyes of young men, mere incumbrances."

"But the change you speak of," replied

Mrs. Almorne, “does not depend on the weakness of the parent ; it is often the instantaneous effect of marriage.”

“Does nature, then, compensate to women for their weakness, by giving them this influence over their husbands? or are they more amiable?”

“They are in general more humane, and less acquainted with vice; but they do not appear to me more praise-worthy. I have sometimes thought, that the difference between the behaviour of men and women to relatives, after marriage, might be owing to their different situations before it. From the domestic state of women, and the softness of their manners, they are accustomed to receive from parents and friends, those sweet attentions,—those small, yet engaging proofs of tenderness, which are so extremely endearing to the human heart; but which a man can very rarely receive from any person except a wife or mistress; and hence it may happen, that he becomes peculiarly devoted

to the object to whom alone he is indebted for them."

"This may perhaps explain the matter," said Lady Ornvile, "but whatever a man may feel, nothing can justify the showing indifference to a mother, if she has deserved his respect. Her duty often proves extremely severe, and can seldom be recompensed by sons; but she should at least, be saved the pain of seeing herself neglected by the beings she has loved and cherished with the fondest affection."

"If men," said Mrs. Almorne, "are oftener than women neglectful of the proper objects of their regard, they are seldomer capriciously cruel to them. We see many women, who bear a respectable character in the world, make the most unjust distinctions between their children; treating those they do not love with harshness and neglect, and sometimes with the most extraordinary severity. If they cannot command their affections, they should at least be humane; but the innocence and helplessness of the little victims of their caprice,

has no effect in restraining their mean exercise of power ; which, considered in all its points of view, is not less shocking than Robespierrian cruelty.

Of this species of capricious cruelty, there are few examples in man : he is oftener a wicked, but seldom so little a creature as woman." }

CHAPTER XVI.



THE regret which Lady Ormville felt for her conduct to her sons, was not confined to the injury it had done to them. Conscious of the many miserable hours it had occasioned to her husband, remorse preyed upon her mind, and in private she delivered herself up to excessive sorrow. In his presence she endeavoured to assume an appearance of tranquillity, but her efforts were not always successful, and he soon perceived the oppressed state of her mind.

Deeply concerned for her suffering, and surprised that time seemed to increase her grief, he anxiously inquired of Constantia, if her mother had received any intelligence of

Hastings that could account for her extraordinary sorrow?

Constantia frankly acknowledged the cause of it, and particularly mentioned the deep regret she felt for the consequences of her errors on his peace.

“Alas! my child,” he replied, “your mother is less to blame than she imagines. I am not without my share of self-reproach;—if it had not been for me, she might have acted very differently. Her errors have sprung chiefly from education. Her capacity is good, and her disposition amiable, but she was nursed in frivolity and idleness.

I was captivated by her beauty, and the cheerfulness of her temper; and, for some time after we married, we were perfectly happy in each other. She sometimes, indeed, sighed for the amusements to which she had been accustomed in her father’s house; but as she loved me truly, and was a fond mother, she might have been completely formed to my wishes, had I conducted myself properly.

Our limited income, and my professional

pursuits, obliged her to pass many hours in solitude, and she often sought in my library for books that could amuse her. I had many that were fit for her; some of which she read with avidity, and showed an inclination to devote much of her time to reading. Had this propensity been properly encouraged, reading would have become one of her chief entertainments; her mind would thus have gradually opened to just views, and instead of training her sons to the love of pleasure and indulgence of passion, she would have understood their true interest, and have endeavoured to promote it by rational means.

At that period it was my misfortune to think, that, in the present state of society, the less women knew the better, and I diverted her mind from reading.

I was likewise anxious to do so from the fear, that it would draw her attention from domestic concerns, which our moderate finances would render particularly unfortunate. I little foresaw, that affluence would soon permit her to follow amusement;—or knew that scarcely any state is so confined, as to prevent our seeking occasionally some means of recreation. I fancied, that, in a situation

which offered no temptation to dissipation, she could not fall into error, and would find herself entirely satisfied in the performance of domestic duties.

I did not perceive, that cultivation of mind was necessary for the proper understanding and fulfilment of those duties, even in the most retired situations. I have since lived to see, that men are never more mistaken, than when they think to secure their interest by confining the understanding of their wives to the discharge of mere household offices.

Some women may, by a singular concurrence of circumstances, be enabled to act an admirable part, without intellectual improvement; but this is a very rare occurrence, and the generality of ignorant women are unfit for the important duties they are called to fulfil.

An improved system of education seems to be prevailing; yet too many of the female sex must still be regarded, in the company of rational men, as mere automats or children. Women ought to obtain a general knowledge of the arts and sciences, and be made well acquainted with history and belles lettres, as the means of giving them expansion and

strength of mind, and an independent source of the highest entertainment.

Men who object to literary knowledge in women, should examine how the generality of them pass their time. Let them observe how much of it is devoted to gossiping and card-playing. Let them attend their tea-tables, and listen to their conversation ; from which they fly to cards or public places, not only as amusements, but from that want of employment which vacant minds must ever feel.

Look into any of the towns of England, and see how great a portion of time is regularly consumed by women, in that little, pilfering, heart-corrupting practice, gaming ;—and then say, whether reading, and the conversation which would result from it, were its consequences even to rise no higher, would not be better ?

An ignorant woman may be a more convenient menial servant, but can never be a useful friend or agreeable companion to a man of sense and information ; and unless men could destroy the influence of women in society, and particularly deprive them of the power of affecting the characters of their

children, they cannot be at too much pains to render them rational.

Experience has shown me, that the fate of individuals is generally far more dependent on their mother than their father. The occupations of men often abstract them from their families; but the influence of a mother in the early years of her children, is unceasing, and its effects frequently extend from the cradle to the grave.

It has been said, that female cares are of a limited, and even trivial nature, but they are in reality of a most various, important, and complicated kind; and may extend to every circumstance and situation of life.

I discovered this too late for my own happiness, but not too late for yours; and I determined to give you an education, which might render you a good house-keeper either for a rich or a poor man; and fit you equally for a companion, wife, or mother.—If your capacity did not permit this, good habits and instruction would at least lessen your chance of doing harm; but if Nature had been liberal to you of her gifts, cultivation of mind would

teach you, how to employ them extensively for the benefit of yourself and others.

Happily Lady Anson and Mrs. Almoré aided my views, and you have rewarded our care: you are a jewel, my love, which they have polished, and shown in its genuine lustre."

Constantia was deeply affected by her father's praise: His approbation was ever the first object of her wishes, and a source of the purest and highest delight.

His heart was gratified, without being distressed by the overflowings of her grateful affection. He embraced her tenderly, saying, "Comfort your mother, my love, and be to her, as you are to me, the consolation and blessing of my life."

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH the most generous kindness Sir John endeavoured to sooth the mind of Lady Orville, and his attempts to alleviate her distress were not without effect. Although he could not banish painful reflections, he softened the severity of her self-reproaches, and she became capable of sustaining her afflictions with more composure.

Time now moved with a heavy pace with every inhabitant of the Abbey, and as the season for casual and promiscuous company was over, all appearance of ease and cheerfulness was at an end.

Which ever way Constantia turned her thoughts, she found herself immersed in care. Of Frederic, she had only heard that he was arrived safe at Altona, but did not know in what state he had found his wife, or what

might be expected from their meeting. Of Hastings and Philip, she was afraid to hear, and of Valmonsor, she scarcely dared to think.

In this situation her great consolation and employment was trying by every means she could devise, to soften the distresses of her father, mother, and Louisa; but her attempts to lessen the unhappiness of the latter, were wholly unsuccessful. She came seldom to the Abbey, and her visits were short. On the slightest hint from Constantia, that her presence could be useful, she came, but no sooner was the object of her visit accomplished, or a guest appeared, who, she imagined, would render her stay unnecessary, than she was eager to depart.

Constantia did not at first oppose her strongly in this, believing she felt the company of strangers painful; but one day that she proposed returning to Oak Hill, when there were no visitors at the Abbey, she earnestly remonstrated against her indulgence of melancholy, and intreated her to remain where she must be much less unhappy than at home.

“ Shall I own,” said Louisa, “ that I am no where so unhappy as at Ornaville? I can be tolerably well at Oak Hill, when I have been there a few days uninterruptedly; but you can form no idea of what I suffer on joining my sisters, after seeing the virtue and harmony which reigns here: I am overpowered by the sight of such goodness.”

“ Is there no chance of Harriet’s making a visit somewhere?”

“ You will perhaps condemn me, when I tell you that I suffer nearly as much from Prudence. The misery arising from Harriet is incomparably greater in degree, but there are moments in which she is forgotten. She passes much of her time in her own apartment, and never troubles herself about small matters; satisfied in taking her own way, she leaves others to do the same. But the vexation occasioned by Prudence, may be compared to the gnawing pain of the tooth-ach, which, though never sympathised with as a serious malady, is always found sufficient to prevent every enjoyment of life. Her temper naturally

wayward, has been completely destroyed by her trouble with Harriet; the turning of a straw will now displease her,—she is for ever on thè watch for something to fret at; discontented with her situation, she torments herself unceasingly, and without intending it is the torment of others. I live with her in perpetual fear and restraint, although I can only accuse her of ill temper.”

“ Let no one say,” cried Constantia, “ that ill temper is a small evil !

“ Since trifles make the sum of human things,
“ And half our misery from our foibles springs ;
“ Since life’s best joys consist in peace and ease,
“ And few can save or serve, but all may please
“ O let th’ ungentle spirit learn from hence,
“ A small unkindness is a great offence.
“ Large bounties to bestow we wish in vain,
“ But all may shun the guilt of giving pain.
“ Smallslights, contempt, neglect, unmix’d with hate,
“ Make up in number what they want in weight.
“ These, and a thousand griefs minute as these,
“ Corrode our comfort, and destroy our ease.”

“ O Louisa! how few can bear the test of domestic intercourse !”

“ Few indeed, but may you never know the pain of being forced to dislike and despise those, who have once been the object of your affection. Would I could forget the innocent Harriet I loved in Cornwall! the dear companion of so many years!—If I lived with amiable people, I should submit patiently to misery, but at Oak Hill I suffer without consolation, and am no where less at home, than when at home.”

“ Return then to Oak Hill no more; let Ornvile be your abode this winter. The distress of my mother on account of Philip, offers to your sisters a just and ostensible cause for our wishing to have a friend always here, and Mrs. Almoré must leave us in a few days.”

“ But Prudence will be offended if she is not the person preferred.”

“ She might, if you were asked as a com-

panion to my mother, but you shall be invited upon my account. My father and mother fear I am suffering by confinement, and will request you to come and share with me my domestic duties."

"In this way I may come without giving Prudence offence."

"They are never easy about me, when you are absent, and had I not imagined our guests were disagreeable to you, I should much sooner have made the proposal."

"Company is not agreeable, but I shall gladly meet with your visitors to escape from our own. I am in daily fear of seeing Trevelian appear."

"Delay not then a moment to come; to-morrow I hope, you will be formally invited by my father."

"Prudence has fortunately just now invited her favourite friend, Miss Willow, to pass some time at Oak Hill, whose company will

be an ample compensation to her for my absence."

"You should never be with Prudence, unless she has a Miss Willow to keep her in good humour. I cannot think with patience of your living with your sisters."

"Yet were I to leave them without an ostensible apology, what censure should I incur! Were it not for this circumstance, I should have several very agreeable homes. There are some valuable women, that were the friends of my mother, who have frequently solicited me to come to them if Prudence and Harriet married. They have been very unfortunate in the loss of children, and I believe I should really be a blessing to them; but they say that they will never ask me to leave my sisters, and I am persuaded would think ill of me, should I propose to do it for more than a short occasional visit. Thus, respect for the ties of consanguinity, compels me to reside in the only place, in which I must be both useless and miserable."

“ Happily it does not oblige you to remain in it this winter ; and against summer, events may occur to separate you from your sisters.”

“ I dare not expect to be so fortunate, but I hope at least, that when we meet again our parting will be at a distance. There is,

“ A tie more stubborn far than nature’s band ;

“ Friendship ! mysterious cement of the soul !

“ Sweetener of life ! And Solder of society !

“ I owe thee much.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE proposal that Louisa should become a resident at the Abbey, was received with high approbation by Sir John and Lady Orville, and next morning he called at Oak Hill to invite her.

He was so much interested in her coming, believing it would be productive of much comfort to his wife and daughter, that he urged his request in a manner, which did not permit Miss Hargrave to oppose it; but he likewise conciliated her completely by intreating with great kindness and sincerity, that she and Harriet would come to the Abbey, as often as their engagements would permit, as their company would afford much satisfaction to Lady Orville.

Miss Hargrave listened to him with the utmost complacency;—observed that all he

said was extremely just ; and most graciously consented to Louisa's passing some time at Ornvile, where she promised to come herself very frequently.

Sir John then took his leave, in the hope of seeing Louisa the next day at the Abbey, but after his departure, Miss Hargrave requested she would remain at Oak Hill, till the arrival of Miss Willow, as she should be uneasy in being left alone with Harriet ; especially as she found herself much indisposed with a cold, which made her languid and low-spirited.

Louisa, who was at all times unwilling to refuse even her most unreasonable requests, readily consented to this, and wrote immediately a note to Constantia, to inform her why she must be a few days later in coming to Ornvile, than she wished.

It was now within a week of Christmas, and in two days Mrs. Almorne was to leave the Abbey, to visit a family about twenty miles distant, where she was engaged to spend the holidays. She would not have thought of leaving Sir John and Lady Ornvile, had she

not known that they were always surrounded by friends at Christmas, who would prevent their suffering any inconvenience from her absence.

The morning before her departure, she requested Contantia, to go and spend the day at Oak Hill. The visit, she said, would be a proper attention to Miss Hargrave; would give pleasure to Louisa, and might be of service to herself; for it was beneficial to change the scene a little, and should the day even pass disagreeably, it would at least bring her back to Ormville with increased satisfaction.

Constantia's reluctance to meet with Harriet, made her very averse to the visit, but she was prevailed upon by Mrs. Almorne, and between twelve and one o'clock, she set out for Oak Hill on foot, and soon arrived there.

Upon inquiring for the family of the servants, she was told that Miss Hargrave was with a lady in the parlour; Miss Harriet was walking, and that Miss Louisa was in her own apartment.

Constantia went immediately up stairs to her room, the door of which she found ajar, and pushing it gently open, saw her leaning her head on the table in a very dejected manner.

As she advanced, Louisa arose, and took her kindly by the hand, but with a countenance so sad, that Constantia alarmed, anxiously inquired if any new distress had occurred?

“None,” she replied, “which I did not expect, or that perhaps I ought to feel as I do, but my weakness is greater than I imagined. The other day, about an hour before your father called, Tresilian came into the parlour, where I was alone. His unexpected appearance disconcerted me, and threw me into a tremor, which excited his concern, though he imputed it entirely to surprise. I know not whether it is from his natural goodness, or my being Harriet’s sister, that he feels for me quickly; but he never sees me distressed without showing regret. The tenderness of his manner affected me, and made

an impression, which would have been sufficiently unfortunate, although I had suffered nothing more from his return; but unhappily I have reason to fear, that absence has increased his attachment to Harriet. The first morning he called, he did not stay long, but yesterday he came at eleven, and passed four hours with her alone. I did not see him, being luckily engaged in settling accounts with Prudence, but to day he returned again at an early hour, and is still here."

"He is gone, for Harriet is walking."

"Yes, but it is with him. I saw them from my window, go out, and imagine she proposed a walk, lest the fine day should bring visitors, who would interrupt their conversation.—Hitherto, she may have trifled with him, but have I not cause to dread she will now think of marriage? And he is so much devoted to her, that I have no doubt she may bring him to offer her his hand, when she pleases."

"Do not let your fears magnify the danger; if he has attended her so long without

forming engagements, why may he not do so still?"

"I never saw him before come three days successively, and make such long visits, which is probably owing to an alteration in her behaviour. To what else can it be attributed?"

"It is time then, he should be undeceived; I will speak to Mrs. Almorne of it."

"Do so, although I tremble for the consequence of any measure that can be proposed."

"When does Miss Willow come? You should not stay here a moment."

"We are in hourly expectation of her, and as she certainly comes to day, I shall ask Prudence to let me now go to Ornvile with you."

"I came to dine here, chiefly from civility to her, and I hope she will consent to your leaving her in the evening."

The conversation was interrupted by a

message from Miss Hargrave, desiring Louisa to come to her.

Upon Louisa and Constantia going down stairs, they found Miss Hargrave alone, with a note in her hand from Miss Willow, apologising for delaying her visit a few days, as she could not conveniently get her father's carriage sooner.

After mentioning the contents of the note, Miss Hargrave told Louisa, that she had sent for her to answer it, as the cold in her head affected her eyes so much, as to render writing painful. "You will tell Miss Willow," continued she, "that we cannot think of being deprived of her company by so trifling a cause, and that our carriage shall therefore attend her early to-morrow, when we hope that nothing will prevent her coming.

"I shall write with pleasure," said Louisa, "but I beg you will dictate what you would have said, that it may be exactly as you wish."

"That will, indeed, be very proper," re-

turned Miss Hargrave, "for otherwise you would probably forget an expression of importance ; but be very expeditious, for her servant must return as quickly as possible to Willow-Grove, with letters of consequence he is carrying to his master."

Louisa immediately sat down to write, and Miss Hargrave began to dictate, after repeatedly enjoining her to attend to what she was about, that she might commit no mistake.

Louisa proceeded with caution, and soon finished a note to the perfect satisfaction of her sister ; but just as she was going to throw sand on it, she heard Harriet's voice at the door, and supposing she was accompanied by Tresilian, her perturbation became so great, that instead of the sand, she took the glass full of ink, and threw it on the note. It instantly covered the paper, and was rapidly making its way to an elegant work-bag that lay on the table, when Miss Hargrave, seeing the impending mischief, sprung forward, and arrested the progress of the ink by her cambric handkerchief.

Louisa sat motionless with surprise and vexation, while Miss Hargrave, in a voice scarcely articulate from rage, loaded her with reproaches.

“ Was there ever,” she cried, as soon as she had vented the first torrent of her indignation, “ so provoking an act ? Did you ever know any thing equal to it ?—Speak, Louisa ! Tell me if you ever saw any thing more provoking !”

“ Never,” replied Louisa, softly.

“ Never ! What then do you think of yourself ? What must every one think ? Tell me,—answer these simple questions——just say what is your opinion of yourself ?”

“ Will you permit me,” said Constantia, anxious to interrupt her, “ to write another note to Miss Willow ?”

“ No, No ;—let you write when there are three Miss Hargraves in the house !”

“ Allow me then to do it,” said Harriet, who was now standing a spectator of the uproar.

Miss Hargrave would hardly have condescended to receive her assistance, had not a servant announced the approach of Lady Manor, whom she desired might be conducted to the drawing-room.

It was with difficulty she could compose herself sufficiently to wait upon her Ladyship, which she at length did, after telling Harriet what she was to write.

Louisa and Constantia had no inclination to accompany her ; and by the time Harriet had written and despatched the note to Miss Willow, Lady Manor’s visit was over, and Miss Hargrave returned.

On entering the room, she said, that Lady Manor had been accompanied by her brother and Captain Noel, two very giddy young men, who could neither look nor speak with composure.

“ Perhaps,” said Harriet, “ they were amused with your appearance ; for I am very sorry I did not sooner observe, that, some how or other, the ink has found its way to your face, and mischievously decorated the tip of your nose.”

Upon hearing this, Miss Hargrave hastily turned to a mirror, and was struck with dismay on beholding her ludicrous appearance. She stood for a moment aghast ;—then violently reproached them all, for having allowed her to make so strange an exhibition.

“ The distress your anger occasioned,” said Harriet, “ made it impossible to attend to any thing else ; it was unlucky Lady Manor called at the moment.”

“ I am not now,” exclaimed Miss Hargrave, “ surprised at the behaviour of the young men ! When I spoke to the one, he put a handkerchief to his mouth to stifle a laugh ; and when I looked at the other, he wheeled about as if he had seen a gorgon. Lady Manor herself had a curious smile on her face, and made an uncommonly short visit.”

“ You can hardly,” said Harriet, “ grudge them their laugh at an accident which would have made any one equally ridiculous.”

“ Does it follow, therefore,” cried Miss Hargrave, with indignation, “ that I can be easy in appearing absurd?—Such accidents should happen to Louisa ; she deserves them ; but it is particularly hard that they fall upon me, who always behave with propriety !—— I really know not what will become of her, if she continues in this extraordinary way !—— She is always committing some blunder or other, and pays no sort of attention to my admonitions, although I fatigue myself to death with giving her advice.”

“ She is excessively stupid,” said Harriet, “ but as it is not natural stupidity, she will recover some day or other.”

“ Were it natural,” cried Miss Hargrave, “ she would have some apology, but her conduct is entirely owing to carelessness. I never see the least cause for any of the odd things she does. What motive, Louisa, could you have for throwing the ink on the paper to-

day?—I can't imagine what could possibly tempt you to do it.—No body was disturbing you,—all was perfectly quiet, yet you destroyed the note, as if it had been on purpose to try my patience."

" Luckily," said Harriet, " the mischief could easily be repaired."

" But it might have been otherwise ; it was only my presence of mind that prevented my beautiful bag and the carpet from being destroyed. But tell me, Louisa, why you did it ? There never was so strange a thing !—Why, I say, Louisa, did you do it ?"

" You may be certain," said Harriet, " that she was not sensible of what she did."

" Nay, if she is not sensible of what she does, what may not happen !"

" I would leave her entirely to herself," said Harriet, " for I do not believe that any thing you can say will effect the smallest alteration upon her. The perfect uniformity

of her behaviour under every change of circumstance, often surprises me."

"One would indeed imagine," exclaimed Miss Hargrave, "that she was sometimes both deaf and dumb!"

"That she is not deaf, we all know," said Harriet; "and therefore her dumbness upon *some* occasions is *astonishing*."

"I know not what to think of her," cried Miss Hargrave,—“but it is happy for you, Louisa, that you live with well-tempered people!”

"It is fortunate," said Harriet, "that she is going to Ornaville; she will be much better there."

"I declare," said Miss Hargrave, "her conduct gives me such concern as must effect my health.—With one thing and another, my peace is quite destroyed."

"I forget to tell you," cried Harriet,

afraid of her insinuations, “that I saw the funeral of Mr. Loftus to-day.”

“Ah! Mr. Loftus!” exclaimed Miss Hargrave, “is he dead?”

“It was thought so.”

“Pho!—What did he die of?”

“Tresilian said an apoplexy.”

“I wonder who will get his office; ’tis a lucrative place, which gives no trouble.”

“Exprefses were immediately sent to town by various candidates.”

“Did you hear what jointure he has left his wife?”

“Tresilian knows nothing of his Will.”

“They never were a happy couple. Where will she reside?”

“Probably with his sister, where they are.”

“ ’Tis said that Miss Loftus is going to be married. I am surprised she has been so long single, for she is very handsome.”

“ Surprise,” said Harriet, “ is often expressed at a woman’s remaining single, who is tolerably handsome, as if the want of good looks was the only circumstance that could prevent her marrying. It may be prevented by such a variety of obstacles, that a woman’s being unmarried should never excite surprise.”

“ I see no variety of obstacles to prevent it,” replied Miss Hargrave; “ if they do exist, women contrive pretty well to overcome them.”

“ To mention no other,” rejoined Harriet, “ must not war, destine many to a single life by depriving them of their lovers?”

“ There are women,” retorted Miss Hargrave, sarcastically, “ who can very easily transfer their affection from one object to another.”

“ It cannot, however,” observed Con-

stantia, “justly occasion surprise, that any women remain unmarried; except, indeed, women of fortune, who are besieged by a very numerous train, and have few difficulties to contend with.”

“Considering the great depth of female sagacity,” said Harriet, “it is rather my surprise, that women of fortune so often marry. I should think that some of them, particularly old women who marry young men, might discover it was their fortune, not themselves, that was the beloved object.”

“It is ridiculous,” replied Miss Hargrave, “for old women to marry young men; but it is not wonderful that others, who have many offers, marry.”

“No woman that behaves properly,” said Louisa, “can have many offers; for few men will make their addresses, when not encouraged.”

At this speech, Miss Hargrave darted a look at Louisa, as if surprised at her presum-

ing to speak in her state of delinquency ; which Harriet observing, cried, “ My dear Prue, you will never be married, if you retain that beautiful ornament upon your nose ; you had better go and remove it, lest we have more visitors ; and when you return, I shall give you some curious anecdotes Trisilian told me of Loftus.”

At the beginning of this address, Miss Hargrave showed strong symptoms of displeasure ; but the conclusion conciliated her, and she quietly withdrew.

“ We must not,” said Harriet, as soon as she was gone, “ speak of any thing to-day but people ;—Louisa, you have offended beyond forgiveness.”

“ I confess,” answered Louisa, “ her anger is not unjust ; I never gave her before so much cause of displeasure.”

“ I shall endeavour,” returned Harriet, “ to keep her quiet this afternoon, if you will

be silent ; but I would not advise you to venture the wisest observation."

" It is fortunate, Constantia, that you are here," said Louisa ; " she will the sooner recover her tone."

" I am sorry," replied Constantia, " that I can do so little to support you, but her voice and countenance disturb me almost as much as they do you."

" Neither of you," said Harriet, " are fit to manage her ; I can but modify her a little, when I devote myself to the purpose. Were you to remain here, Louisa, this ink would give a dismal hue to her conversation, these six weeks."

" There is however," said Louisa, " an end to my design of leaving her to-night ; after this fracas, 'tis impossible to propose it."

" Will you come then," asked Constantia, " early to-morrow ? Mrs. Almorne leaves

us before breakfast, and after she is gone, my mother will feel very lonely."

"Send your carriage for her," said Harriet, "early in the morning, and Prudence will then neither oppose nor blame her departure."

Constantia and Louisa were much pleased with this proposal, and it was settled that a carriage should be sent from Ornaville to Oak Hill the next morning by ten o'clock.

CHAPTER XIX.



CONSTANTIA informed Mrs. Alnorne of the behaviour of Tresilian, which appeared to her alarming, and she began to fear the apprehensions of Louisa were too well founded; yet she wished to indulge a hope, that his visits might be owing to accidental causes, and that he would quickly resume his former habits. She regretted that she was obliged to leave Orville immediately, but desired Constantia to inform her in two or three days how he conducted himself, and said that she would in the mean-time consider what should be done.

When Constantia met with her father and mother the next morning at breakfast, she proposed their sending the carriage for Louisa, to which they cheerfully agreed, and desired

that she would go in it, and secure her coming.

She objected to leaving her mother alone, and said that a message would do equally well.

“No,” replied her father, “it will not do so well; and I beg that you will go, and bring her round by Elbourne, that you may see your sister, and have a ride; it will do you good, and you may be perfectly easy in leaving your mother, for she and I will take a game at chess in your absence.”

As Constantia knew that it would be a hardship on her father to pass the morning at chess, she again declined going; but her mother joined so earnestly in the request, that she was obliged to comply; and as soon as breakfast was over, she set out for Oak Hill.

On arriving there, she found Louisa in the parlour alone. She told her that she was

come for her at the desire of her father and mother, and hoped she was ready to depart.

“I am extremely sorry,” replied Louisa, “that I am under the necessity of remaining here another day. Last night, I told Prudence, that you had wished me to accompany you home, which I declined from supposing it would not be agreeable to her. She said that it would vex her much if I went before to-morrow, as she was in so awkward a way with Harriet, that she was persuaded Miss Willow would perceive it, if we were not all here to divide her attention the first day of her visit.”

“I am afraid then,” said Constantia, “that I cannot urge your going.”

“Did you consult Mrs. Almorne about Tresilian?” asked Louisa.

“I did, and she thinks your fears may be mistaken, but she is to consider what should be done.”

“It will be too late,—all is indeed already

over!—he came here this morning before breakfast.”

“ And is he now with Harriet ? ”

“ They are walking. It is plain he cannot stay away from her.”

“ I shall let Mrs. Almorne know immediately.”

“ But what can she do? I have lost all hope of saving him.—How fortunate it is for me that I am going to leave Oak Hill.”

“ At Ornvile, you will at least be spared the pain of seeing them.”

“ It will relieve me greatly if you can remain with me this morning till his visit is over. He knows that I am going to reside at Ornvile, and when Harriet proposed a walk, said that he hoped to find me here on his return. I wish to part from him civilly, but am wretched in being with him and Harriet alone.”

“My father and mother wished me to go to Elbourne, but as it was on my own account, they will excuse me if I remain with you. I shall however, send back the carriage and walk home.”

Louisa immediately rung the bell, and when the carriage was ordered away, Constantia renewed the conversation by asking, if Harriet behaved to Tresilian with her former ease and gaiety?

“I have seen them little together,” replied Louisa; “but this morning, she wore an appearance of cheerfulness, which, I think, she can scarcely feel, unless it arises from him.”

“I hear them approaching;—exert yourself, Louisa, to sustain this meeting with firmness.”

Harriet and Tresilian now entered, and the former advancing with a gay air to Constantia, cried, “I am happy to see you; you will support me against Tresilian; he has been telling me the conditions on which alone he

will consent to marry, and they are quite imperial: he means to rule with absolute power."

"Miss Orville will acknowledge," said Tresilian, "that when an enemy agrees to capitulate, the preliminaries of peace should be so clearly settled, as to give no occasion for future contest: Miss Harriet's conditions will sufficiently justify mine."

"Mine," cried Harriet, "are merely designed to secure me from that fatal change,

"The captive lover, for the tyrant lord."

"And I," said Tresilian, "wish only to defend myself from the caprices of the fair."

"Whom," rejoined Harriet, "your conditions show, you think,

"Of outward form elaborate, of inward less exact."

"I am afraid," replied Tresilian, "that

whatever a man in love may think, his feelings will govern his conduct.

“ Yes, even thy faults, bewitching fair,
“ With such delights my soul possesses;
“ That whether faithless or sincere,
“ I cannot love thee more, or less.—”

Although this conversation had the air of badinage, yet in Louisa's state of mind, it was too much for her. As Tresilian repeated the above lines, a deadly paleness overspread her face—her whole frame appeared agitated, and finding herself overcome by sensations, which she could neither suppress nor conceal, she rose with trepidation, and quitted the room.

Her sudden change of countenance, was not unobserved by any of the company, and her abrupt departure seemed to impose silence on them all. Constantia was grieved—Harriet appeared surprised, and Tresilian astonished. He fixed his eyes alternately upon them, as if seeking an explanation of her behaviour, but for a minute no one attempted to speak.

Constantia's first impulse, on Louisa's leav-

ing the room, was to follow her, but she was restrained by anxiety to know in what manner Harriet and Tresilian would interpret her behaviour. Finding that no observations were made, it occurred to her, that the best thing she could do for Louisa, was to take Tresilian away, and without giving herself much time for reflection, she told him, that she had a fancy to be escorted by him home.

He politely assented, and Harriet making no effort to detain them, they departed.

As they walked, Constantia attempted to engage him in conversation, but he gave her slight answers, and seemed absorbed in reflection.

At length he asked, if she was not alarmed by her friend's illness?

"I hope," answered Constantia, "her indisposition is trifling."

"It was very sudden," rejoined he; "she was in her usual health a few minutes before."

"She was tolerably well," returned Constantia.

"Is she subject to sudden illnesses?"

"She is not," replied Constantia.

"Can you account then for her disorder?" said Treilian, fixing his eyes intently upon her face.

Constantia's rigid adherence to truth, made her hesitate, and the earnest manner in which he continued to gaze upon her, threw her into confusion.

"I would give a great deal, Miss Ormville," cried he, eagerly, "to know what is passing in your mind."

"It would give you no satisfaction," answered Constantia quickly, whose thoughts at the instant rested upon Harriet.

"How!" cried he with surprise, "is it possible, that you can know any thing of Louisa

Hargrave, which it would not give me satisfaction to hear?"

"I was not thinking of her."

"Of whom then, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"It may not be right to tell you."

"Yet I am extremely anxious to know. My curiosity must appear impertinent, but I confess the discovering to what you allude, is of more consequence to me than you can imagine."

"For that reason I should be the more cautious in what I say. You would not be pleased to hear that I thought you extremely mistaken in the opinion you entertain of a favourite."

"I know of no favourite I have, about whom we can differ materially."

Constantia looked expressively without answering.

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"I know of no favourite I have, about whom we can differ materially."

Constantia looked expressively without answering.

After pausing a moment he exclaimed, "Is it credible that you can mean Harriet Hargrave?"

Her countenance answered in the affirmative.

"I am sorry,—very sorry," cried he, with earnestness, "that we should differ in opinion about her."

"It grieves me extremely," replied Constantia, with much emotion, "to give you such painful intelligence."

"Painful it is indeed,——but you are mistaken, extremely mistaken, if you suppose that I am *particularly* interested in her."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Constantia, "can it be other wise?"

"Most certain'y."

"How much should I rejoice, if I could believe that you do not deceive yourself!"

“I certainly do not ; but why should you rejoice ?”

“Because she is not the character that you imagine.”

“I regret it—deeply regret it, yet only as a friend.—But may I presume to ask, Miss Orville, if the extraordinary satisfaction you appear to feel, arises only from benevolent concern for me, or ——”

He stopt, but his question disconcerted Constantia, and seeing her embarrassment, he said, “It is unfair thus to molest you ; your countenance encourages me to speak freely, and if you will permit me, I will tell you——”

He hesitated, but Constantia requested he would speak without reserve, assured that she would listen with pleasure, and answer with candour.

“I will acknowledge then,” he resumed, “that I should think myself one of the most fortunate of men, if I could suppose that you

traordinary is it to indulge hope of her affection, that I tremble lest you should in an instant dash it to the ground."

"Perhaps," said Constantia, "I should leave it to herself, to encourage or disappoint your hopes as she may think proper, but after the avowal you have made, I cannot leave you in painful suspense. I will confess to you then, that you are not indifferent to her, and that her reserved behaviour has proceeded from her conviction of your attachment to Harriet."

"How much do I feel your goodness in thus generously relieving my anxiety!"

"I shall think myself fortunate if I can, in any degree, contribute to your happiness; but tell me by what unhappy means you were first led to mistake her sentiments?"

"By her own behaviour, which now appears to me inexplicable. At Larch Wood, I thought she saw my partiality for her, and I flattered myself encouraged it; but very

soon after, she treated me with the most forbidding reserve."

"Did no previous alteration in your manner justify the change in hers?"

"I am unconscious of any."

"I know that soon after you visited at Oak Hill, she had reason to believe that you were engrossed by Harriet. You certainly paid her very flattering attentions, and broke an important engagement you had with Mr. Harman, that you might dance with her at Fancourt-Place, although your doing so was a violation of all politeness to Louisa."

"Is it possible that Louisa did not know how it happened!"

"She knew of no cause for it, but your preference of Harriet."

"How extraordinary is this! I never had a doubt of her knowing the circumstances that led to it;—nor had I the smallest sus-

picion that she could mistake any of my attentions to her sister."

"How could she do otherwise?"

"Because Harriet understood them perfectly; and could I imagine that two such sisters did not possess the confidence of each other?"

"Unhappily, Harriet and Louisa are sisters, but not friends."

"It has been my misfortune, Madam, to fancy that sisters and friends were synonymous terms. I now see that to explain my conduct properly, I ought to give you a history of myself since my acquaintance with your friend, if you can have patience to listen to it?"

Constantia assured him it would oblige her extremely.

"I presume," said he, "that you are no stranger to the happy hours I passed with her

at Larch Wood. When she left it, I resolved to offer her my hand as soon as I could be a little assured of her affection; and in the hope of gaining it, I was anxious to pay every attention in my power to her sisters, as well as to herself. I supposed that they would receive them with the full consciousness of my views; and although I was surprised at Harriet's engaging me in parties in which Louisa could not join, I attributed it merely to thoughtlessness.

My dancing with her at Fancourt-Place, was her contrivance, not mine. She asked me if I was to be there, and I told her, as I had done Louisa, that an engagement would prevent me. She then reminded me of a discussion we had had about dancing, when we agreed to take the first opportunity of dancing together; and added, that I ought not to miss Mrs. Fancourt's ball, as it would be a very agreeable one. I told her, that on the day of it, I must go with Mr. Harman to Rochester, where he had business in which I was to assist him. The delay of a day, she replied, may be of little consequence; go and tell him of our engagement, and say,

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that I desired you to ask if he could postpone his journey.

I obeyed her injunctions with pleasure ; for I had now become anxious to be at the ball. Hitherto I had seen Louisa only in small and quiet parties, and I wished to have an opportunity of observing her conduct in a scene of amusement, where she would be surrounded by a number of gay men and flip-pant women.

Harman begged me to tell him frankly, if I was really desirous of attending the ball, and I acknowledged that I was. He then inquired if I should have any objection to setting off for Rochester the moment it was over ; for, said he, my business will not admit of delay, but we shall be in time for it if we set out about three or four in the morning. I joyfully agreed to his proposal, and hastened to Oak hill, to inform your friends of my design.

I found Harriet alone, but I entertained not a doubt of her communicating faithfully to Louisa, all that I said. You may imagine then my disappointment upon going to Fancourt-Place, when I found that Louisa was.

not there. I could hardly conceal my chagrin from Harriet; which she aggravated by saying, when I inquired why Louisa was absent, that she had remained at home from being indifferent about the party.

This information mortified me excessively, and put me so much out of spirits, that I could scarcely converse with any one excepting Harriet, whom my dancing with obliged me to attend to, and whose unwearied endeavours to entertain me, excited my gratitude."

"Yet your attention to her misled all the sisters. Harriet, on her return from the ball, said that she believed she had made a conquest of you, and Miss Hargrave's observations confirmed her opinion."

"Is it possible that Harriet could construe my neglect of others into attachment to herself?—If she did, she was quickly undeceived; but I shall proceed with my story, and leave you to judge for yourself.

Upon my return from Rochester, I was struck with the coldness and gravity of Louisa's

my behaviour. Though her manners are so gay and easy, that attentions from her cannot be viewed in the serious light that other women's might, yet they are apt to lead a man farther than he may wish. I felt myself in this predicament; and that no mistakes might arise, I told her, that though I had eyes and ears to be charmed with her, I had no heart to give, having disposed of mine before we met. This declaration, which I repeated more than once, made me easy in behaving as I pleased, without fear of leading her to entertain expectations of me as a lover."

" Yet I am persuaded she indulged such hopes, and probably believed, that, as soon as you became indifferent about Louisa, you would be attracted by her."

" She was extremely mistaken; for though I had ceased to love her sister, I should never have rested my affections upon her. Had we met before I saw Louisa, she might have captivated me; but, shielded from her at first by my passion for another, I was enabled to discover traits in her character which would for

ever secure me from her power. She loves admiration to a degree, that in a wife would render me miserable, and is deficient in qualities, which are the most necessary to my happiness. It was not the loveliness of your friend that first attracted me, but the extreme softness of manners which so peculiarly distinguishes her, and which to me is one of the very first charms in woman. It kept me her captive, though I was assured of her indifference; for the gentleness of her disposition made it impossible to be displeased, however she might disregard me.

When she returned from Captain Elford's in Summer, I saw that illness could have no share in her melancholy, for the latter was increased, although her health was good. Her indifference to me was not diminished, but the plaintive sweetness of her manner rendered her so interesting, that I could not resolve to give up seeing her, while I had not a rival to dread.—Of a rival I never had a shadow of fear; she seemed blind and deaf to every man that approached her.—But I fear, Madam, I grow tiresome; the interest I take in this narration carries me too far?"

“By no means,” answered Constantia; “I listen anxiously to every word that you say, and beg you will proceed: no subject can be more interesting to me.”

“Thus encouraged, I will continue my relation. I had now been so long without hope, that although I was hardly less attached to her, I was much less unhappy than in the first days of my disappointment, and flattered myself I should soon regain my tranquillity. Accordingly, I was recovering my spirits fast, when one day I met with her at Ramsgate, and on her return home, accompanied her part of the way. Our conversation was interesting, and she expressed esteem for me in a manner that equally delighted and surprised me. It awakened all my tenderness, and made me more than ever lament, that I had not been so fortunate as to gain her affection.

The next day I was obliged to go to a distance, and on my return, heard that Harriet was in a fever. Alarmed for her, and for the consequences of her illness on Louisa, I flew to Oak Hill, where I saw the latter. The

extreme tenderness she discovered, which I attributed to anxiety about her sister, fascinated me so much, that I know not what I might have said, had not Miss Hargrave entered the room.

I took leave so impressed with admiration, that I thought if she would accept of me, even though she could not return my affection, I might be happier with her, since I was certain of her esteem, than I could ever be without her. Full of this idea, I went to Oak Hill the next morning with the intention of offering her my hand, but she was attending Harriet, and could not be seen.

I begged of Miss Hargrave to tell her, that I should return the next day at the same hour, when I hoped to have the pleasure of seeing her; but the two following mornings I called with no better success. I was now convinced that she designedly avoided me, and concluded that she suspected my intention, and took this way of showing me that I had nothing to hope. I left the house in despair, not unmixed with displeasure, determined to return to it no more; and that I might the more easily keep my resolution, I set out imme-

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versation with Harriet, which produced such blessed effects; yet so much has my conduct been influenced by her, that those very lines I addressed to her sister, were suggested by my situation with herself."

"You have been singularly misled," said Constantia, "but I trust your disappointments are over."

"Dare you promise that Miss Ornvill? I am full of apprehension, and distrust my happiness the more, as the steadiness of Louisa's affection under such unfavourable circumstances, renders her so infinitely dear and valuable."

"She is more estimable than you can imagine, till long experience has unfolded to you her worth; but I think I may venture to say that you have little cause for apprehension."

"I am most grateful to that goodness which wishes to relieve my fears, but till I hear your words confirmed by herself, I can-

not feel assured of my happiness. When will you see her. ?”

“ Not before to-morrow, I fear, as to-day she is engaged with company ;—yet I cannot leave her so long ignorant of your safety, which independent of all concern for herself, has occasioned her the utmost anxiety. I shall write a few lines to her.”

“ Permit me to be the bearer of them ?”

“ Will she not be distressed in seeing you ?”

“ I shall only request to see her at the door for a moment, and the instant I have had the pleasure of putting your note into her hand, I shall leave her. My groom and horses wait for me at Oak Hill, which will account for my being your messenger.”

“ Well, then; let it be so.”

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“ Well, then; let it be so.”

“ Will you allow me to return to you? I have yet much to say.”

“It will give me much pleasure, and my father and mother will rejoice to see you. Remain here, till I bring the note for Louisa; I shall not be a minute in returning.”

“I shall in all things obey you.”

She then left him, and hastened to the Abbey, from which she was but a short way, as they had been walking near it for some time.

In a few minutes she returned with the following note.

“My dear Louisa,

“I have but a moment to tell you, that your fears for Tresilian are mistaken. Though I were not limited as to time, it would be impossible to express what I feel in being the harbinger of peace to you.

“C. O.”

“I bring my note open,” said Constantia, “as you may wish to see what I have said; read it as you walk, and you can seal it at the farm-house you pass.”

Tresilian kissed the hand that held out the note to him, and hurried away, while she returned to the house with a lightness of heart to which she had been long a stranger.

She found her father and mother finishing a game at chess. She sat down on a sofa beside the latter, and when the game was over, made Louisa's apology for not coming, and her own for staying away so long.

"I am glad, my dear, that you staid," said Lady Ornvile, "since it has made you happy; your countenance bespeaks much satisfaction."

"I am indeed joyful," said Constantia, the cause of which, I shall tell you to-morrow; to-day I am not at liberty."

"It is sufficient for me, my love," replied her mother, "that you are pleased;—but, alas! Constantia, I am become so weak, that I am almost as easily softened by joy, as by sorrow. I weep now with joy, my sweet child, to see you with so cheerful a face.—"

I thought that I should never again see the sun shine, but your countenance is like the rays of the sun in a fine morning, when my eyes first open to the light."

Constantia folded her mother in her arms, and mingled her tears with hers.

Sir John was affected by the sight, and sitting down beside them, entreated Lady Ornvile not to let her grief diminish the joy of Constantia, but rather let the joy of the latter banish her sorrow.

"Most anxiously," said Lady Ornvile, "would I guard her from sorrow,—for how can I cherish her enough, when you have often told me, that you never thought of her, without feeling increased affection for me!"

"How!" cried Constantia, while she sat between her father and mother, and grasped a hand of each, "could I ever for a moment think myself unhappy, when I had such a father and mother!—Oh! Affection, how divine is thy influence!"

A long and sad, but sweet silence prevailed, till Constantia hearing the opening of doors, said that Tresilian was coming. "I have," added she, "promised him a cordial reception; he is the cause of my joy."

"We shall welcome him then, my love," said her father, "for your sake, as well as his own; and he comes opportunely to revive our spirits."

Tresilian now appeared, and was most kindly received by Sir John and Lady Ornaville.

"I have been observing," said the latter, as soon as he was seated, "that my daughter's countenance has been enlivened by her visit to Oak Hill, and yours is in unison with hers: you seem as if you had never known care."

"I think, Madam," replied Tresilian, "that I have known a great deal, but at present I feel only joy. Miss Ornaville has banished my

cares, and given me a happiness which, a few hours ago, I believed was impossible."

"Does not this," said Sir John, "lead you to accuse yourself for having been a stranger to us?"

"Too painfully, Sir: I have been wandering blindly in search of happiness where it was not to be found, when here it awaited me."

A call to dinner interrupted the conversation.

* * * *

In the evening Tresilian asked Constantia, how early the next day she would see Louisa?

"I intend," she replied, "to send her a message in the morning, which will bring her here as soon as breakfast is over. Do you

wish that I should explain my note to her, or will you do it yourself?"

"You will oblige me, by informing her of all that I have told you."

"Shall I leave nothing for you to tell?"

"Nothing, in the way of detail. I have not patience for it."

"As our conversation must then be pretty long, had you not better go home in the morning, and return about one o'clock, that you may not linger here in suspense."

"Do not send me to a distance. I shall, if you please, saunter about the Abbey till I can see her, but do not bid me go farther."

"I thought," replied Constantia, smiling, "that, in all things, you were to obey me. However, I can propose a better scheme than yours. If the weather is tolerable, my father will take a ride near the Abbey, and will be happy to be accompanied by you; after it

you may either remain with him, or take a walk till you can see Louisa."

This proposal was joyfully agreed to by Tresilian

CHAPTER XX.



IN the morning, the weather being favourable, Tresilian accompanied Sir John on a little excursion, and soon after their departure Louisa arrived.

Constantia having given her mother a book to read which she knew would interest her, withdrew with Louisa to her own apartment, where she asked what she had thought of the note she had sent her yesterday ?

“ At first,” replied Louisa, “ I thought that my eyes deceived me, and read it twenty times, before I could believe that I was not under a delusion ; I then imagined that you were deceived.”

“ I am not deceived, Louisa, either in what

I wrote, or in more agreeable information I have yet to give you,—but first, let me ask, if you think you can support joy as well as you have done sorrow ?”

“ I know not my own strength, Constantia, but I feel that I am too much agitated to bear easily a state of suspense.”

Constantia then, with great caution and gentleness, related the conversation she had had with Tresilian, to which Louisa listened with extreme anxiety ; but when Constantia ceased speaking, she remained in a profound reverie, without testifying any token of joy.

After a short silence, Constantia endeavoured to awaken her to a sense of the happy change in her situation, and expressed regret at her not feeling it in the manner she expected.

“ I have no belief in it,” answered Louisa ;
“ I think it a dream from which I shall awake, to be depressed lower than before.”

“ It is no dream, my beloved friend—it is a blessed reality.”

“ Often, Constantia, have I seen you thus in my sleep, endeavouring to console, and bidding me take comfort,—yet when I awoke, I found that I had no comfort but yourself.— Yet how,” cried Louisa, bursting into tears, and clasping Constantia in her arms, “ could I complain of having no other comfort! did I not in you find a treasure!”

Louisa’s tears flowed freely, and Constantia made no attempt to restrain them, believing that she would be better for thus indulging her feelings; but, as soon as she was a little composed, she entreated that she might have the satisfaction of seeing her rejoice.

“ I dare not rejoice,” said Louisa, “ I have been so long inured to sorrow,—so long without hope of comfort, that I cannot believe happiness is destined for me.—When Tresilian knows the conduct of Harriet, what will he think?”

“ That he cannot too soon release you from her.”

“ Will he not distrust me?”

“My dear Louisa, how unjust is this? Have you not a thousand times condemned the cruelty and injustice of involving a whole family in the disgrace of one?”

“True, but I talked then of the world at large; I did not apprehend the pain that I now feel in the thoughts of discovering to the man whom I think of as a husband, the ignominy of my sister.”

“But when that man is Tresilian, of whose affection you are assured, and in whose character you may place the highest trust, how can you admit a fear?”

“The more I esteem him, the more I expect that he must be shocked with the story of Harriet;—but it must be told—never, Constantia, shall I see him until he is acquainted with the characters of the persons, to whom he wishes to be allied.”

“I approve of your intention, but have no doubt of the event. I shall give him any information that you please.”

“ I am grieved to give you so painful an office, yet know not how it can be avoided.”

“ It is the only way ; allow me instantly to go to him ? ”

“ He is here then ? ”

“ He would not go away till he saw you.”

“ Will he say so after the disclosure you have to make ? ”

“ There is no doubt of it.”

“ I tremble with fear,—but you must tell him all. Fortunately, I have Mrs. Elford’s letter in my pocket ; I brought it as you desired to read it again.”

Louisa took out the letter, and gave it to Constantia, who after entreating her to try and regain some composure, left her to go in quest of Tresilian.

“ Upon inquiry, she was told that he had

returned from his ride, and was gone out to walk."

She followed to the place, which they had appointed for meeting, where she found him waiting for her with the utmost anxiety.

"Miss Ornvillle," said he, as she approached, "your long absence has made me sick with apprehension, and now your countenance confirms my fears."

"You have little to fear," replied Constantia, "but you have something to hear, before you can see Louisa."

"Tell me first, if you have not been mistaken in her affections for me, and I shall then listen with patience to any thing you say."

"Her affection is all that you can wish, but she thinks there are obstacles to your union."

"What obstacles?" cried he, quickly.

“in what respect am I so unfortunate as to be disagreeable to her?”

“In none whatever ; her objections are not to you, but to herself for your sake.”

“For my sake there can be none,—I would not now lose her for worlds!”

“I hope you will not think her objections ought to be regarded, but it is proper that you should know them. If you will return with me to the house, I shall there inform you of them.”

Tresilian accompanied Constantia to a parlour, where, in few words, she made him acquainted with the conduct of Harriet; the distress it had given her sisters, their difference of opinion upon the occasion, and their final determination in consequence of Mrs. Elford's letter, which she put into his hand.

He listened to her recital in great agitation, which increased as he read the letter. When he had perused it, he returned it saying,

CHAPTER XXI.

THE prospect of a happy destiny to Louisa, had much effect on raising the spirits of Sir John and Lady Ornaville. They rejoiced in it, both from their great regard for herself, and from the high satisfaction it gave Constantia; and omitted nothing in their power which could contribute to the comfort of either.

It was fixed that the marriage should take place as soon as settlements could be drawn, the terms of which, Tresilian wished to leave entirely to Sir John; but as he could not be prevailed upon to determine them, they were settled by Tresilian, in a manner that gave the most perfect satisfaction to the family.

One of Louisa's first cares was to inform Mrs. Elford of her intended marriage, and she was exceedingly gratified by Tresilian's voluntarily writing to her at the same time, a letter full of respect and kindness.

The satisfaction which their marriage gave Mrs. Elford, was a great addition to the happiness of Louisa, and she indulged with inexpressible pleasure, the hope that her house would occasionally prove an asylum to Mrs. Elford, in which she would experience every consolation that friendship could give.

To Miss Hargrave, Louisa's union with so respectable and rich a man as Tresilian, was, on different accounts, the occasion of much joy. She had a sincere regard for Louisa, which would alone have made her rejoice in her being happily settled, but she was likewise glad for the sake of all the family, that they had made a new and valuable alliance, at a moment in which she thought they stood particularly in need of support; and she expected that it would produce a change in her own situation, which would

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prevent her suffering any longer from Harriet's extravagance.

On Christmas-Day, Sir Thomas and Lady Vyner, and Sir Robert and Lady Horndon, with their eldest son and daughter, came to spend a week at the Abbey.

Lady Horndon had always been much happier at Ornaville than elsewhere, from knowing that Sir Robert would there carefully accommodate himself to the wishes of her father and mother; but the change effected on her by the improvement of his temper, gave her now an uncommon degree of spirit and animation, which contributed much to the satisfaction of her father and mother, who at all times felt particular pleasure in the presence of her and her family. The concurrence of so many agreeable circumstances insensibly diffused gladness into the hearts of Sir John and Lady Ornaville, and Ornaville Abbey appeared once more the seat of joy and festivity.

The only visitor at the Abbey who, it might be supposed, did not partake of the general

joy, was Harriet ; but whatever she felt, she behaved prudently. She came to Ornvile whenever she thought her company was particularly desired or expected by Sir John and Lady Ornvile, and always appeared with her usual good humour ; but, on various pretexts, she contrived to be as little there as decency would permit.

When Tresilian met with her, he behaved civilly ; but he declared to Louisa and Constantia, that no regard to appearances should ever induce him to sacrifice his sincerity so far as to treat her with more than ordinary civility.

When this scheme was proposed to Harriet, she made no objection to it, and rather seemed to approve, as she said the country in winter had become very disagreeable to her ; but, as new views might open, before it would be necessary to change their place of residence, she requested that no measures might be taken with respect to it till May, the time at which it would be requisite to give notice to the proprietor of Oak Hill, that it was their intention to remove.

Miss Hargrave readily complied with this proposal, highly satisfied that Harriet offered no objection to the design of living at Ramsgate, which promised advantages that were far more agreeable to her, than any which she had ever known at Oak Hill. Having few domestic occupations, and no taste for music, drawing, or reading, her comfort rested chiefly on what she called society, but which her sisters called gossiping ; and for this agreeable recreation, she knew that she should have an ample field in any small town.

Harriet also proposed, that they should spend the three or four ensuing months in

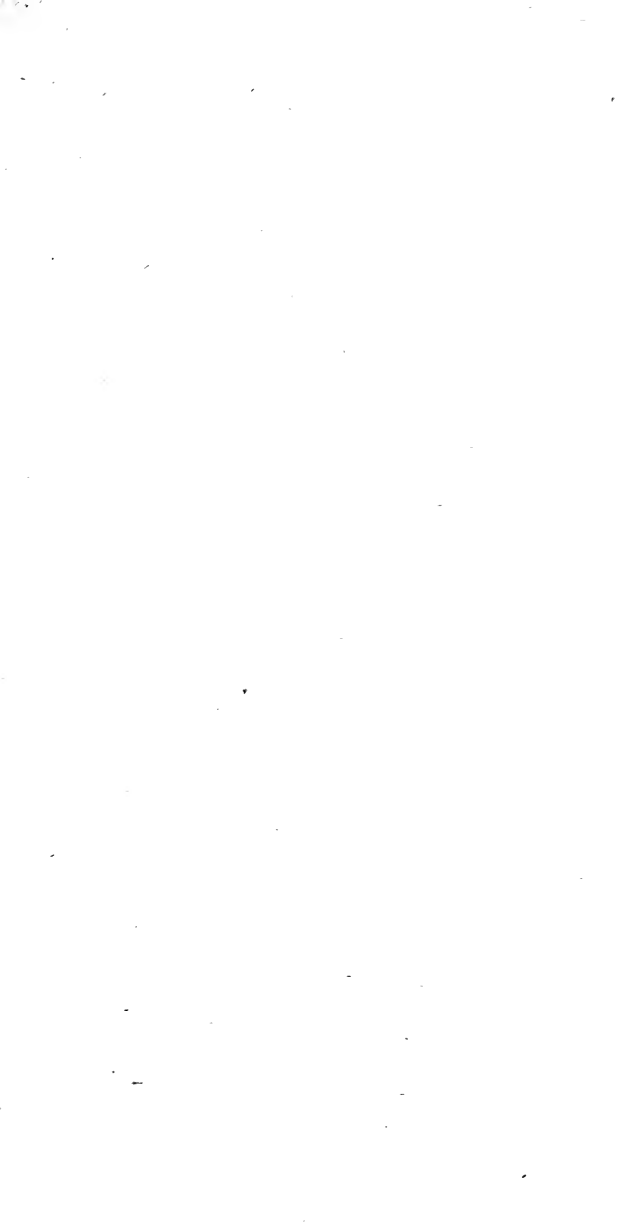
visiting friends from whom they had lately received invitations, as they were quite disengaged, and should find their residence at Oak Hill extremely dull.

Miss Hargrave agreed entirely in this opinion, and they accordingly, to their mutual satisfaction, arranged their affairs for a separation of some months, and upon the twelfth of January bid adieu to Oak Hill.

Their departure was not more agreeable to themselves than to Constantia, who rejoiced in being separated from Harriet, and hoped to pass some time at Ornaville, without the presence of any disagreeable guest.

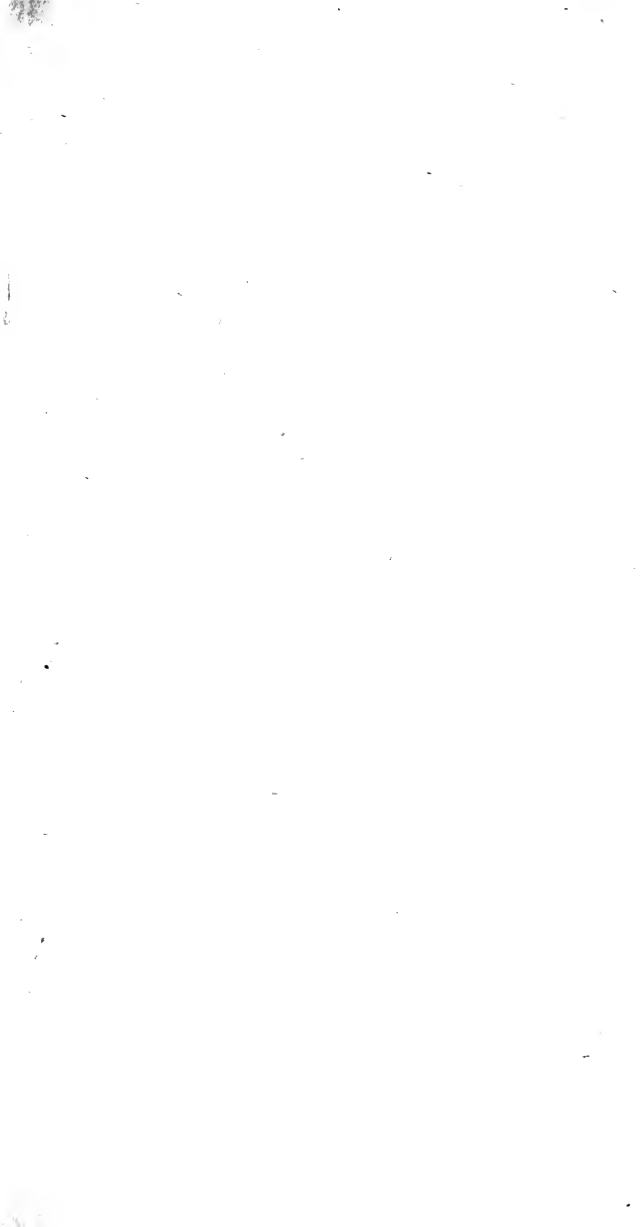
The happy termination of her cares for Louisa, had taken a load off her mind, and although much still hung very heavy upon it, she expected that she should now experience a state of calm melancholy, and with regard to her father and mother at least, be exempted from fresh perturbations.

Printed at the Office of
T. WILSON and R. SPENCE,
High-Ousegate, York.









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